THE HIMALAYAS IN INDIAN ART

E. B. HAVELL

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE HIMALAYAS IN INDIAN ART

BY E. B. HAVELL

AUTHOR OF "INDIAN SCULPTURE AND PAINTING"; "THE IDEALS OF INDIAN ART"
"A HANDBOOK OF INDIAN ART"; "THE HISTORY OF ARYAN RULE IN INDIA"
"A SHORT HISTORY OF INDIA," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

THIS monograph, which represents the Forlong Bequest Lectures given at the School of Oriental Studies, 1924, offers a new approach to the study of Indian art, by way of the Himalayas—certainly the surest and most direct path for arriving at the central ideas of the Indian artist and craftsman. Public interest for the moment is concentrated on Himalayan scientific exploration. The Himalayas offer equal opportunities for artistic research: they have always been the pivot of Indian religious art. The Indian order of architecture, the design of Indian temples, and the symbolism of the principal figures in Indian iconography are all focussed on the Himalayas. Since the publication of my *Indian Sculpture and Painting* in 1908 the literature of Indian art has been constantly growing; the present work is partly a summary, partly a revision, and partly a completion of my previous studies. It presents concisely the leading ideas of the Indian temple builder, sculptor, and painter, and connects the artistic traditions of India with Indian daily life and work.

In preparing the illustrations I have to acknowledge the assistance kindly given me by Dr. Annie Besant; Mr. Stanley Clarke, Curator, Indian Section, Victoria and Albert Museum; Messrs. F. Davidson & Co.;

Mr. O. C. Gangoly; Mr. H. V. Lanchester, F.R.I.B.A.; Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd.; Sir John Marshall, Director-General of the Archæological Survey of India; Dr. Abanindra Nath Tagore, C.I.E.; and Dr. F. W. Thomas, Librarian of the India Office.

E. B. H.

OXFORD, *June* 1924

INTRODUCTION

THE Western artist who strives to penetrate into the inner sanctuary of Indian thought has first to clear the ground of many misconceptions, obscurities, and historical fallacies, for Indian art, though very old in itself, is from a Western point of view a new subject of study. It is hardly more than fifteen years since it began to emerge from the category of ethnology and to be taken seriously into account by modern art critics as belonging to the domain of æsthetics, from which we generally exclude all the art of uncivilised peoples. Ruskin, in the mid-Victorian era, brought his heaviest artillery to bear upon it, and attributed to the Devil and his myrmidons all the ideas of the Hindu sculptor and painter as he understood them. Even James Fergusson, whose great pioneer work aroused European interest in Indian architecture, attributed to Pathans, Arabs, and Mongols a special genius for building which did not belong to Indians. Though the beauty of the Ajantā paintings compelled admiration, they were, he thought, to be explained as an offshoot of the Early Persian School, and therefore distantly connected with Greek art. He used the term "Pauranic art," in which category most of the great masterpieces of Indian sculpture are contained, in a depreciatory sense, implying a period of decadence in which the creative inspiration of Greece was lost and Indian art reverted to its own primitive barbarism.

Ruskin's influence prevailed when art teaching was made a part of our educational programme in India. Schools of art were to resume, less violently, but more effectively, the iconoclastic propaganda of Aurangzeb and bring the light of South Kensington to shine upon the darkness of Indian imagination. The same influence ruled for more than half a century in the administration of our national art museums. The British and other leading museums of Europe for a long time .classified all Indian art in which Greek influence could not be detected as "ethnological," that is, as a scientific rather than artistic study. Although later on Sir George Birdwood at South Kensington made a cult of Indian decorative design in textiles, jewellery, pottery, and domestic utensils, his handbook to the Indian Section of the museum, which was the official guide until a few years ago, peremptorily excluded Indian sculpture and painting from the category of "fine art." In 1884 when the Indian Institute was opened at Oxford to facilitate and foster Indian studies at the University, the word "art" was carefully avoided by the promoters of the scheme. The Institute was dedicated to Eastern sciences and to the honour of Indian learning and literature. The founders expressed the pious wish that both Englishmen and Indians would appreciate better than they had done before the languages, literature, and *industries* of India. It was too much in those days to ask a man of culture to admire the art of India without considerable reservations.

We have travelled far from the nineteenth-century standpoint since then. The vital and all-important quality of Indian art— its livingness—is still regarded either with intolerant scepticism or with indifference as an inconvenient and rather annoying subject. But it has been gradually recognised that India for many centuries was the centre of a dynamic æsthetic impulse which profoundly influenced the whole art of Asia. Probably, when the study of Indian art has grown out of its infancy, we shall also discover that it had a far greater influence upon Western art than we are now inclined to admit. A very important book by Professor Josef Strzygowski on the *Origin of Christian Church Art*[1] points in that direction.

I shall not, however, in this monograph invite the reader to follow up that line of research, more archæological than artistic, which limits the analysis of art to the enquiry as to how far one school borrowed forms and fashions from its neighbours, like the modern tailor and dressmaker. This is, after all, only a kind of inventory of the artist's stock-in-trade, of his tools and accessories. It is a line of research which is interesting and important for the historian, but it helps very little to discover the inner thoughts and motives of any art. If archæological methods and inferences were applied as drastically to English art as they have been to Indian, we might be forced to the conclusion that there has been little if any art in England which we can call our own.

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[1] Oxford University Press.

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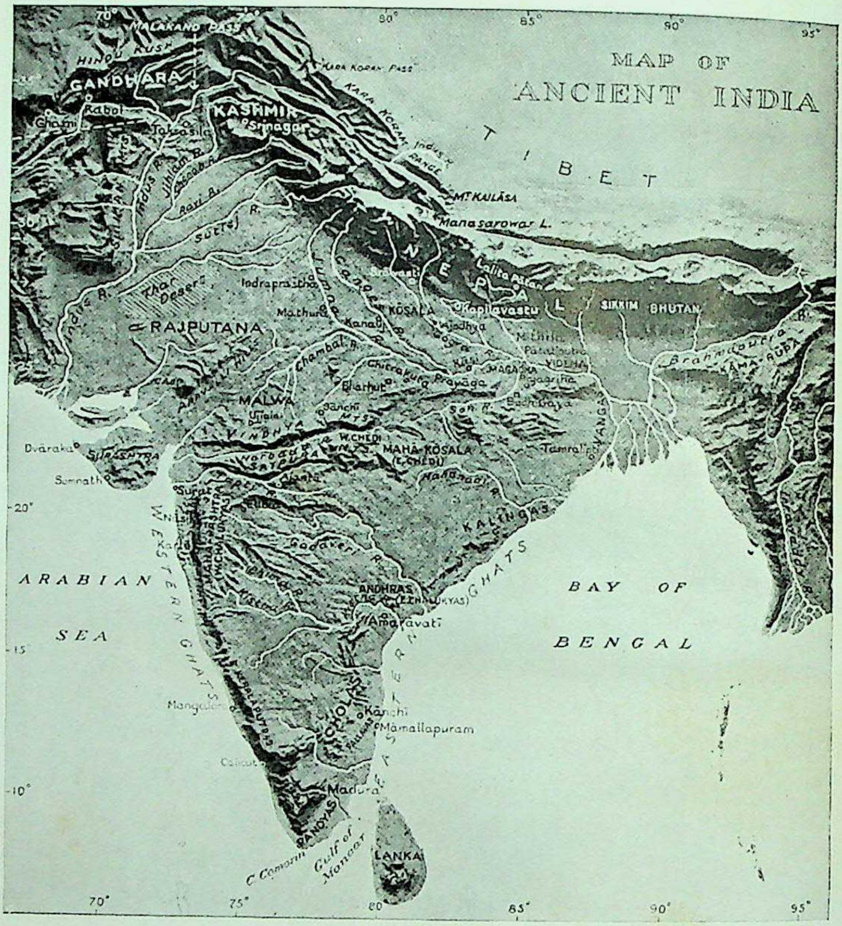
PLATE I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Srinagar
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TIBET
MT. KAILASA
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KAMA-RUPA
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Ravi R.
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Thar Desert
Indraprastha
Jumna R.
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Kanauj
Ajodhya
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RAJPUTANA
Chambal R.
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ANDHRAS
(E. CHALUKYAS)
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ARABIAN SEA
WESTERN GHATS
EASTERN GHATS
BAY OF BENGAL
Mangalore
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KERALAPUTRAS
CHOLAS
PALLAVAS
Kanchi
Mamallapuram
Madura
PANDYAS
C. Comorin
Gulf of Manaar
LANKA

THE SOUTHERN PETAL OF THE WORLD LOTUS.

(*Map of India reproduced from the Author's Short "History of India," by permission of the Publishers, Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ld.*)

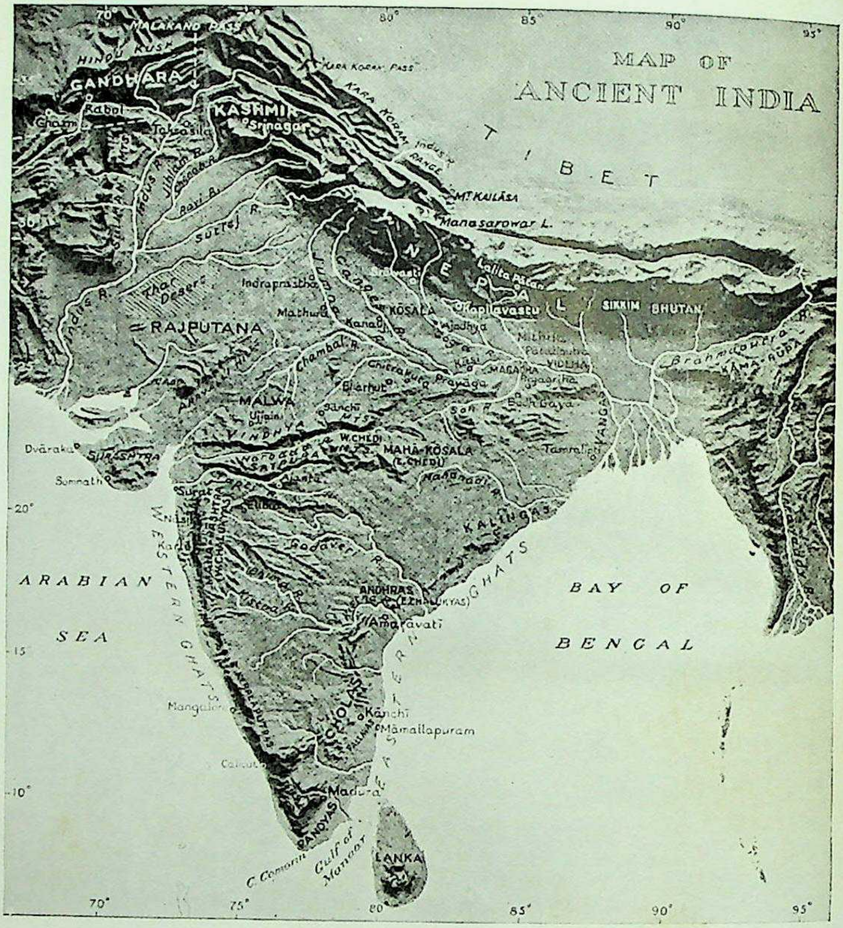
THE HIMALAYAS IN INDIAN ART

CHAPTER I

THE INDIAN ORDER OF ARCHITECTURE—THE HIMALAYAS AS THE CREATOR'S SHRINE AND THE WORLD PILLAR

ALL the dynamic impulses of art come from a people's efforts at self-realisation, as they are influenced by their mode of life, religious thought, and by the impressions they derive from their environment. It will, therefore, be our chief aim to trace some of the most vital impulses in Indian art to their fountain-head and connect them with Indian life and thought. Ruskin's charge against Indian artists was that they had wilfully sealed up and put aside the entire volume of the world and had thrown a veil over the whole spectacle of creation. It would be far nearer the mark to say that, just because they tried so earnestly to penetrate through the veil of natural appearances and used the forms of art to explain their philosophy of life, it is sometimes hard for those who cannot read their symbolic language to follow their line of thought and to understand their intentions. Though art is to some extent a universal language, so much so that great artists in all countries do not often need an interpreter between themselves, a critic who misunder-

PLATE I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The interpretation of Indian artistic symbolism is not an easy matter, because Sanskrit literature, so far as it has been examined for this purpose, apparently gives very little clue to the meaning of it. At least Sanskrit scholars in the West have not yet brought to light much clear information on this point. This may be because the study of Indian art is still so young. It must be said, however, that Kalidāsa's poetry is an exception to the rule—if there is such a rule—for it teems with similes, metaphors, and suggestions which illuminate the meaning of Indian sculpture and painting. The Indian poet whom European men of letters were not slow to appreciate regards nature with the same eye as the artist they could not understand. In these pages full use will be made of Kalidāsa's help as an interpreter.

But after all, the inductive is not the only or the surest method of analysing art. It is rather by living in the atmosphere in which art grows and by opening one's mind to the impressions of its environment that one comes intuitively to a true understanding of it. To assume, as Ruskin did, that a whole people deliberately shut their eyes to the beauties of nature, and were wholly insensible to the impressions of their environment, is to render oneself incapable of entering into the spirit of their art, for no artistic movement, so long-lived and so intimately bound up with a people's life as that of India, ever existed, or could exist, which had not its deepest roots in the impressions made upon the human mind by the spiritual and material environment in which that art was created. A people who are insensible to impressions from their own environment create no art, for they lack the motive power which is behind all art creation.

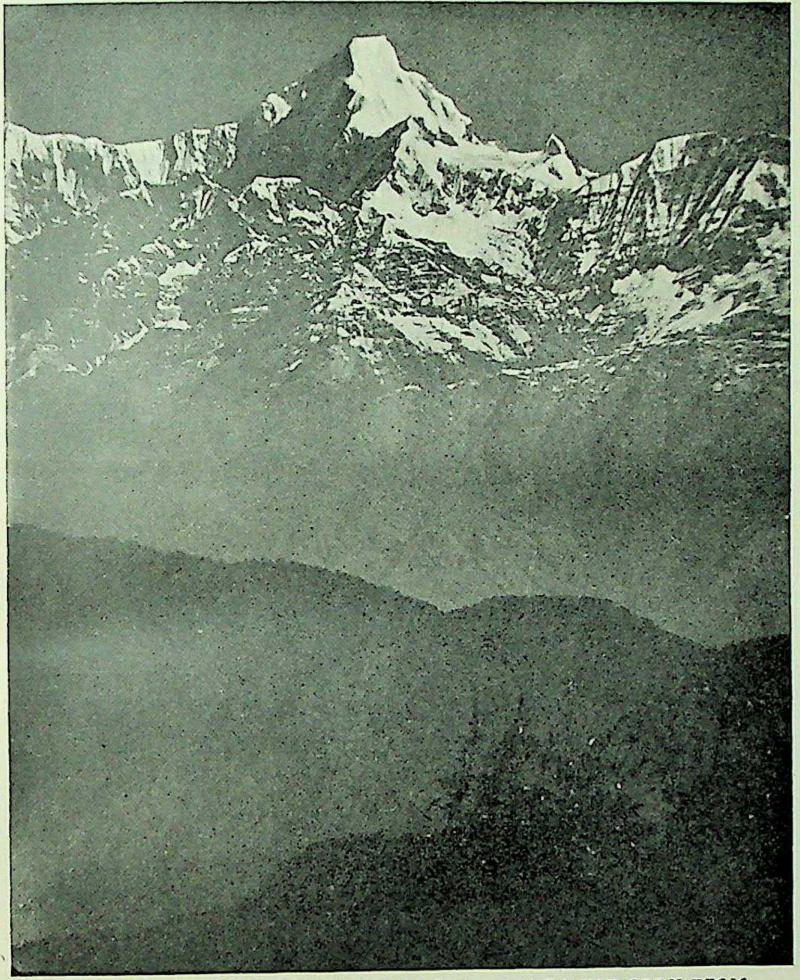

Fig. 1.—ON THE ROAD TO KAILĀSA: *NANDA KOT SEEN FROM MUKTESAR.*[1]

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[1] Figs. 1, 2, and 12 are from photographs taken by the "Davon" Micro-Telescope, F. Davidson & Co., London.

One need not go very far in India to discover the aspect of nature which always made the deepest impression upon the Indian mind. Look at a map (Pl. I) and see the majestic mountain wall which towers over the plains of Hindustan, holds up the monsoon clouds, and acts as a reservoir for the great rivers which give life to India. Take only a cursory survey of Indian literature, and you will find that all Indian poetry and mythology point to the Himalayas as the centre of the world, and as the throne of the great gods. Or if you will follow the life of modern India and join the constant stream of pilgrims wending their way from shrine to shrine you will find that the ultimate goal of sādhu and sannyāsin is up the rugged Himalayan slopes to Badrinath and Kedarnath, or to the inner sanctuary of the Abode of Snow on Mt. Kailāsa. For those who shrink from such long and arduous pilgrimages Benares and other sacred cities offer an easier form of sādhana, but even in the farthest south of India the Hindu regards the Himalayas not from the point of view of the mountaineering sportsman or of the scientist, but as the Muhammadan thinks of Mecca and the Christian of Jerusalem.

It would be strange indeed if such deep and abiding impressions as the mystery and grandeur of the Himalayas obviously made upon the Indian mind had found no reflection in Indian religious art. But it is not too much to say that the feeling of awe and adoration which their majesty inspired gives the key-note to the interpretation of Indian art. Here is the chief clue to the meaning of Indian symbolism. In India, however, one cannot, except in what we call Mogul art, separate æsthetics from religion. Religion

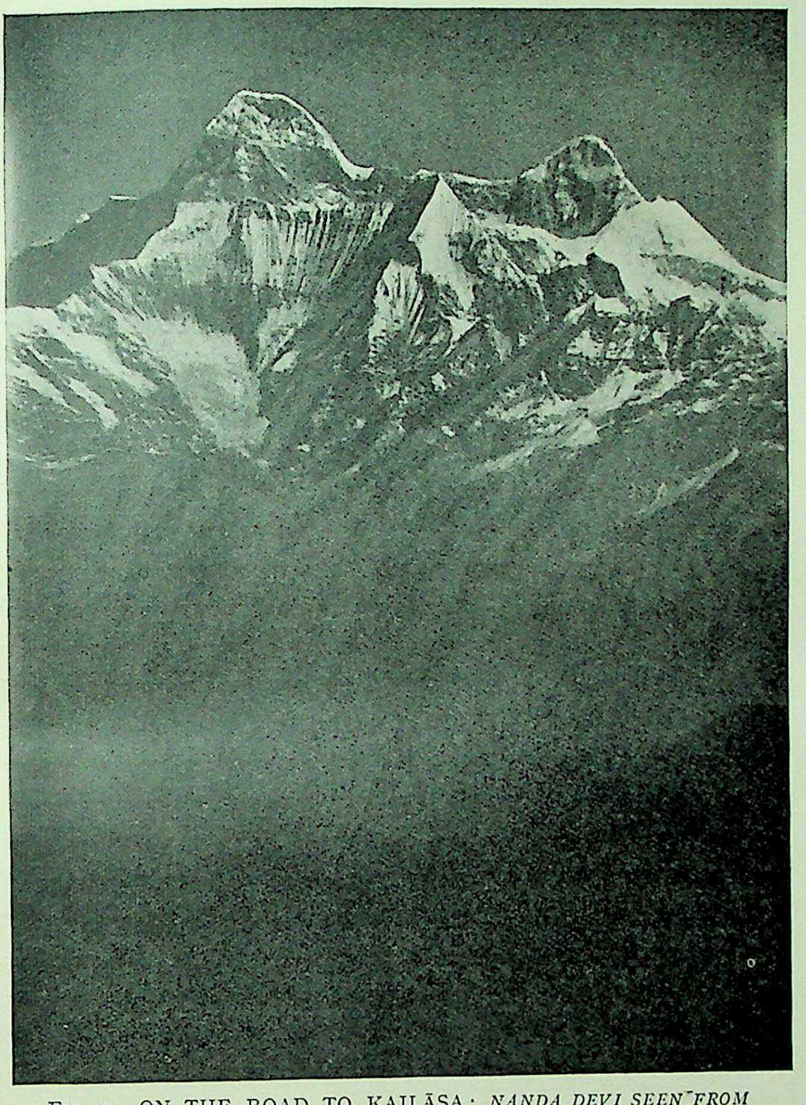

FIG. 2.—ON THE ROAD TO KAILĀSA: *NANDA DEVI SEEN FROM MUKTESAR.*

is the inspiration of all vital art. The Indians did not admire and worship the Himalayas only because they were beautiful, majestic, and wonderful, but chiefly

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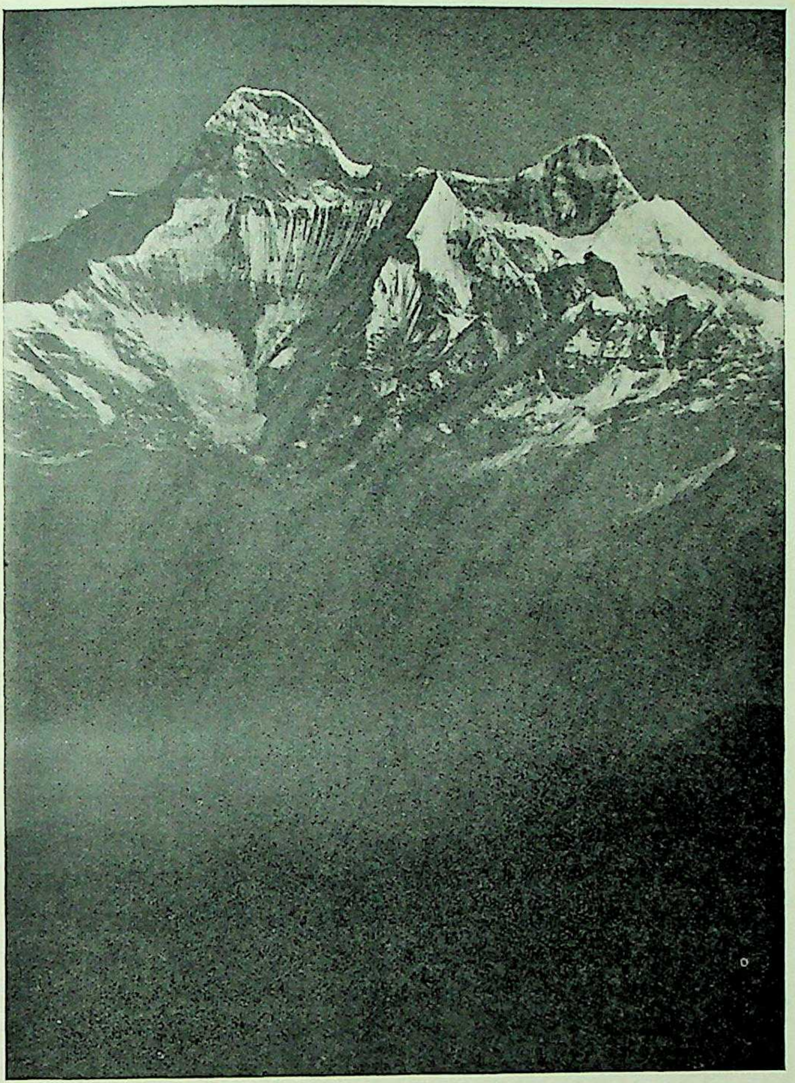


FIG. 2.—ON THE ROAD TO KAILĀSA: *NANDA DEVI SEEN FROM MUKTESAR.*

is the inspiration of all vital art. The Indians did not admire and worship the Himalayas only because they were beautiful, majestic, and wonderful, but chiefly because within their inner fastnesses they guarded the worshipful source of life, the fount of purity which made India a fertile, prosperous, and holy land. The common prayer of humanity, "Give us this day our daily bread," the first boon which the Christian asks of his heavenly Father, conveys the thought which inspired Indian worship at the great Himalayan well of life.

Now let us follow more closely the Indian line of thought with regard to the Himalayas. Near the centre of the Himalayan region is the wonderful lake Mānasarovara, about 15,500 feet above sea-level, which, according to Indian ideas, was the fountain-head of the whole river system of Asia. This generalisation is not perhaps accurate enough to be regarded as scientific geography, but the fact that the Indus, the Brahmaputra, and the Ganges have their sources not far from its shores sufficiently accounts for the veneration with which it was regarded. In this region, says the Vishnu Purāna, most significantly for the student of Indian art, the Creator, Brahmā, has his throne, "like the seed vessel of a lotus." The shores of the lake are very regularly indented, so that its shape suggests a lotus flower. Towering above it towards the north-west is Mt. Kailāsa, its great pyramidal snow-peak shaped like the thatched roof of a forest hermit's hut (Pl. VIIIA). Surely here, thought the pious pilgrim, must dwell the Divine Yogi, Siva, and his consort, Pārvatī, Himalaya's fair daughter, watching together their wonder-making Līlā, the interplay of cosmic forces which makes and unmakes worlds innumerable! It was this suggestion of a Divine Presence in the solitude of the eternal snows, and the situation of the mountain close to the sacred lake, which gave Kailāsa its peculiar sanctity.

Ekai Kawaguchi, the learned abbot of a Buddhist monastery in Japan, in one of the most fascinating books of modern travel, *Three Years in Tibet*, describes thus the impressions which this wonderful lake and mountain made upon his mind :

> "About thirteen miles onward a view opened before us which I shall never forget, so exquisitely grand was its scenery. In short, we were now in the presence of the sacred lake Mānasarovara. A huge octagon in shape, with marvellously symmetrical indentations, Lake Mānasarovara, with its clear, placid waters and the Mt. Kailāsa guarding its north-western corner, form a picture which is at once unique and sublime, and well worthy of its dignified surroundings, calm, dustless, and rugged. Mt. Kailāsa itself towers so majestically above the peaks around that I fancied I saw in it the image of our mighty Lord Buddha, calmly addressing his five hundred disciples. Verily, verily, it was a natural mandala. The hunger and thirst, the perils of dashing streams and freezing blizzard, the pain of writhing under heavy burdens, the anxiety of wandering over trackless wilds, the exhaustion and the lacerations, all the troubles and sufferings I had just come through, seemed like dust which was washed away and purified by the spiritual waters of the lake ; and thus I attained to the spiritual plane of the Non-Ego, together with this scenery showing Its-own-reality."[1]

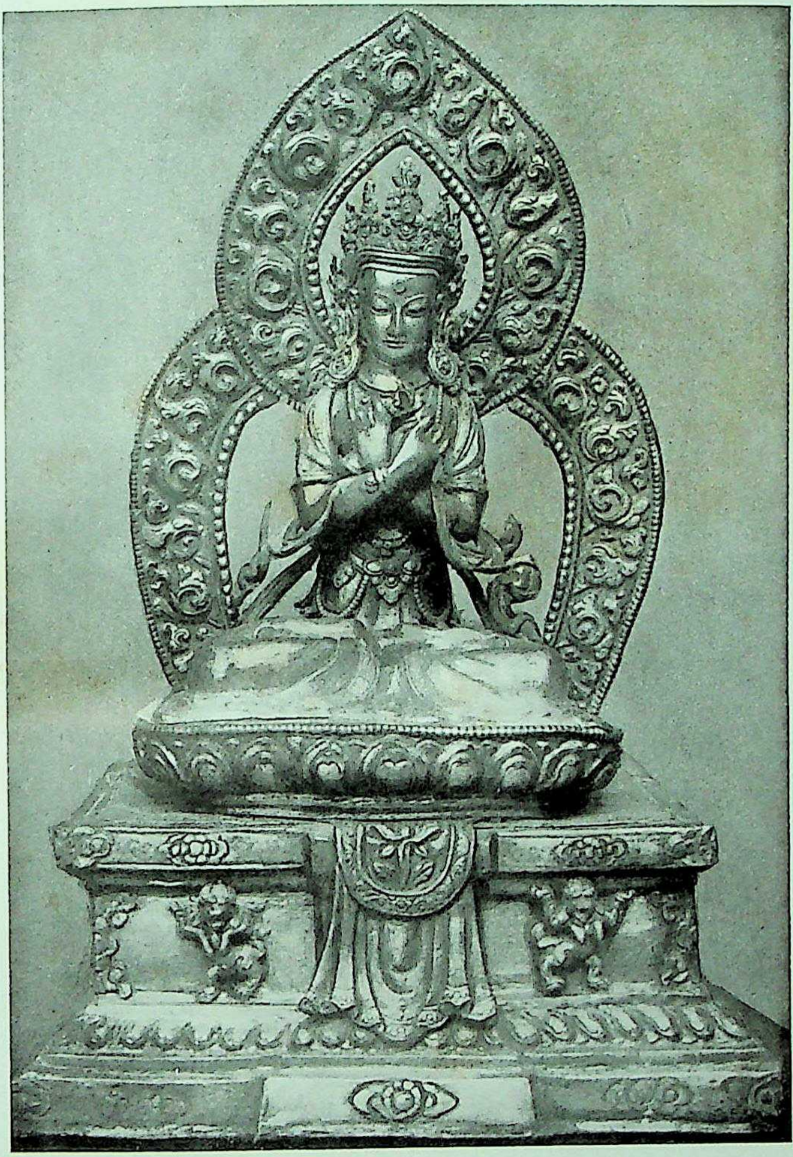
He goes on to describe what he calls the wonders of Nature's temple, the mysterious shapes in the rocks resembling images of the Buddha and his disciples, the fantastic snow-peaks, and thundering cascades like dragons, and the crystal mansion of Kuvera, the god of wealth, sung by Kalidāsa in the Meghaduta, shining in the emerald sky. Kawaguchi only echoes the thoughts of countless Indian pilgrims who from Vedic times down to the present day have climbed those perilous steeps to worship at that wondrous shrine.

---

[1] *Three Years in Tibet*, pp. 140–1.

The map (Pl. I) indicates the exact position of the sacred lake and mountain and of the great rivers diverging from that centre and pouring down the Himalayan slopes on to the plains of northern India. The upper waters of the Brahmaputra flow eastward for nine hundred miles until they find an outlet at the farther extremity of the Himalayas, turn first south and then west, along the borders of Assam, until finally they join the Ganges in its course towards the Bay of Bengal. On the opposite side of the lake, though not in contact with it, the Indus flows westwards, emptying itself eventually in the Indian Ocean. The symbolism of the Purānas assumes that the Ganges, Jumna, and their chief tributaries form the southern arm of the river crossways which diverge from Lake Mānasarovara. The northern arm of the cross does not appear on the map, and it is not quite clear which river was meant by it. It may have been the Oxus or the river which flows into the Tarim basin. But the Pauranic idea, which, as we shall presently discover, is very strongly emphasised in the symbolism of Indian art, is that the continent of Asia was to be conceived as a four-petalled lotus flower, the eastern petal containing China, the western Persia and the countries beyond, the northern one Turkestan and the countries beyond it, and the southern one India.

PLATE II



A BODHISATTVA ON LOTUS THRONE.

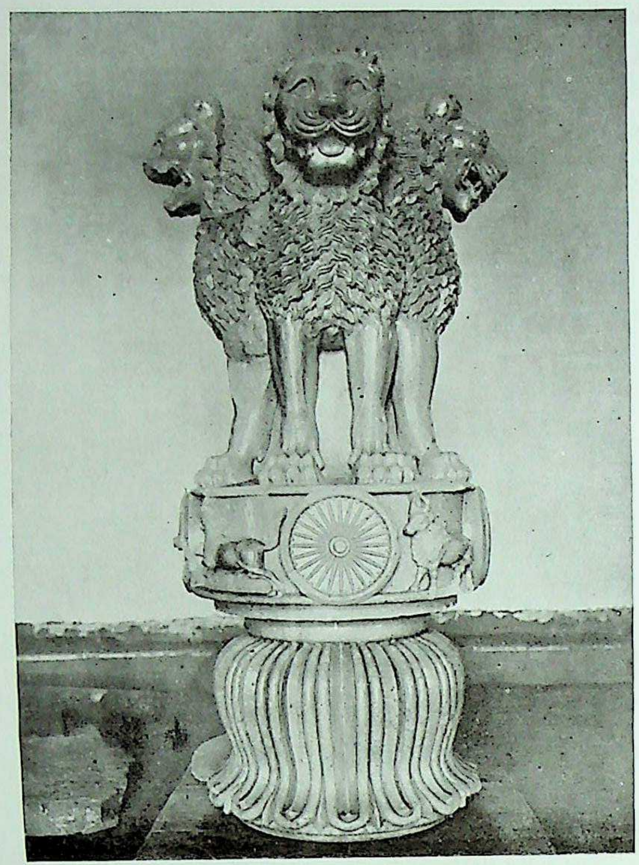
The illustrations (Figs. 1 and 2) will give some idea, not of Kailāsa itself, but of the wonderful scenery of the Himalayas on the road of the great northern pilgrimage to the centre of World Lotus. In the foreground are the level ridges covered by mighty forests of deodars, the sacred trees of the Devas, from which the early Aryan worshippers had a glorious vista of the glittering snow-peaks where the Devas themselves had their palaces and lotus thrones—the mountain peaks which formed the inner whorls of the great four-petalled World Lotus.

Kalidās in the Meghaduta declares that the lofty peaks of Kailāsa " fill the sky like lotuses." The poetic simile explains the sculptor's and painter's idea in using a lotus flower as a throne or footstool for the gods (Pl. II). Looking at this wonderful scenery it is easy to understand that the Himalayan people in Vedic times, with their ideals of simple living and high thinking, had no special need of temples and images other than those which the Divine Craftsman, Viçvakarman, who built earth and heaven, had placed before their eyes.

It is supposed that as long as the early Aryans, the authors and compilers of the Vedic hymns, had their home in the Himalayan regions they built no great temples and made little or no use of the sculptor's and painter's art in their religious ritual. Furthermore, it has been assumed that being a philosophic folk they were inartistic, as modern philosophers usually are, and that it was the Greeks, or Hellenised foreigners, who brought to India both the ideas and the craftsmanship which raised Indian art above the level of primitive or barbaric people. But is it not rather presumptuous for us moderns, living in an age more remarkable for scientific and archæological discovery than for great artistic accomplishment, to assert that the people whose imagination could rise to the height of the Vedic hymns and the Upanishads, the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata, were lacking in artistic sensibility and incapable of original artistic creation? It would be more reasonable to assume that as long as the Rishis, who laid the foundation of Indian religious philosophy, lived within sight of the gods' own dwelling-places, so long as they were able to worship them in those great forest cathedrals which Nature had built at the foot of the Devas' thrones, it seemed vain and foolish to build for them elaborate shrines of wood, or brick, or stone. But when the Aryans, or the people who adopted Aryan culture, spread farther and farther out of sight of the Himalayas, they always carried with them the deep impressions which their early environment had made upon them, and perpetuated them in the images and symbols used in their religious ritual. This in fact is what we shall find to be the primary creative impulse in the beginnings of Indian art, and the impulse is certainly Indo-Aryan, not Greek or Persian.

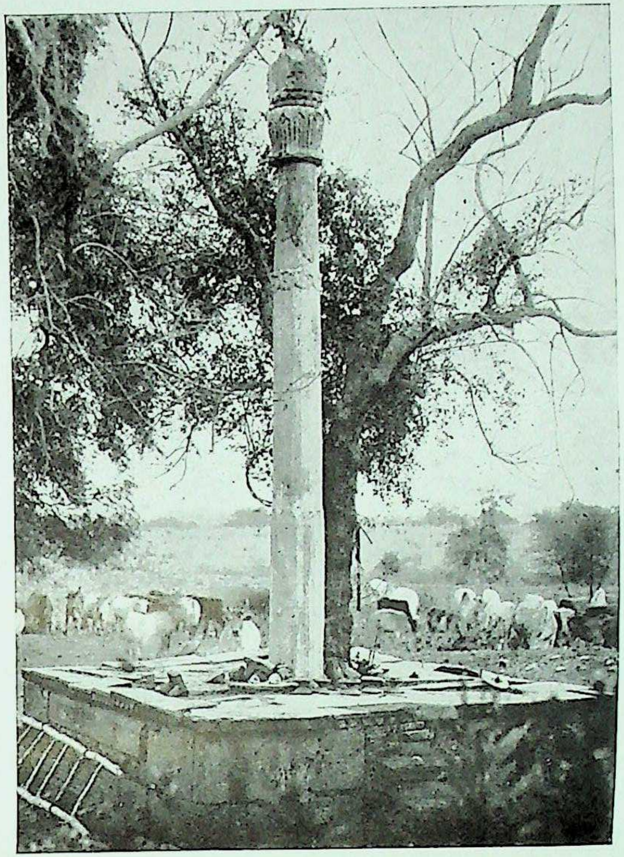
Let us now bear in mind the familiar Indian symbol which the Purānas use in describing the geography of the Himalayas. The Himalayas, they say, form the centre of the World Lotus. The seed-vessel of the Lotus was Brahmā's holy city in the region of Mt. Kailāsa (Pl. VIIIA), and of the lake Mānasarovara, whose deep blue waters mirrored the Creator's mind. The Himalayan snows were the glittering up-turned petals of the flower. The plains of India, together

PLATE IIIA



THE PILLAR OF THE WORLD LOTUS, SARNĀTH.

PLATE IIIB



THE PILLAR OF THE WORLD LOTUS, BESNAGAR.

(Erected by order of Heliodorus of Taxila, circ. 140 B.C.)

with the sub-Himalayan slopes, formed the southern one of its four great petals turned down upon the stalk which sprang from the navel of Narayana, the Eternal Spirit reposing on the bed of the cosmic ocean. The lotus symbol, like all other Indian symbols, had a metaphysical, or subjective, as well as an objective significance. Rooted deep in the mud of a lake or river and pushing its way gradually upwards through the water until its fair flower blossomed in the light of heaven, the lotus or water-lily was Nature's own symbol of the spiritual process by which the human mind won liberation in Nirvana. But I shall here confine myself to the attempt to show the natural derivations of Indian art, the objective foundation upon which the subjective or introspective symbolism was founded.

Let us now take one of the best-known and earliest monuments of Indian art (Pl. IIIA), the capital of the famous pillar raised by Asoka at Sarnāth on the spot where the Buddha began to preach, or to " turn the Wheel of the Law." Sir John Marshall in the Cambridge History of India describes it as an exotic, alien to Indian ideas in expression ; he follows James Fergusson in stating that the form of it was evolved in Persia. Similar forms are undoubtedly to be found in Persia, and as nothing earlier of this type of capital has been discovered in India, archæologists have assumed that the Indian order of architecture in which this type of capital predominates was of Persian origin—that Indian builders in Asoka's time and afterwards took this foreign importation as a pattern, just as a modern European builder will copy any capital of Greek, Roman, Egyptian, or any other style, according to the fashion of the day. But it must be remembered that Asokan buildings could not possibly have been the starting point of Indian architecture. Centuries before Asoka's time Indian kings must have built fine palaces of wood with carved capitals. There must, therefore, have been a *vernacular Indian art* and an indigenous order of architecture long before Asoka's time, and if we examine carefully reproductions of typical Indian buildings carved upon the earliest monuments and compare them with the symbolic geography of the Purānas we shall inevitably, I think, come to the conclusion that this Sarnāth capital was nothing more or less than the attempt of a foreign craftsman, imbued with Hellenic ideas, to represent the World Lotus of which Lake Mānasarovara was the centre and India itself one of the four great petals.

We find Kalidāsa in the Kumara-sambhava addressing King Himalaya as "Earth's stately Pillar girt about with cloud." The design of Asoka's pillars was the architectural rendering of the Indian poetical metaphor, imperfectly understood by Persian craftsmen. The standards of the Great King showed the World Pillar surmounted by the emblems of Buddhism to proclaim the universal dominion of the Good Law.

Kawaguchi, whose description of the lake has been quoted above, mentions a local tradition that there were four outlets to the waters, named respectively after a peacock, a bull, a horse, and a lion: he adds that these outlets formed the sources of the four sacred rivers of India. The Chinese tradition embodied in a map of the region, prepared by order of the Emperor Chien Lung in the eighteenth century, corresponds with the Tibetan, except that it substitutes an elephant for the peacock. Now upon the abacus of the Sarnāth capital, above the conspicuous bell-shaped member, there are four animals carved in high relief—the same which this Chinese map gives as the symbols of the four gates of the Mānasarovara lake, namely the elephant, bull, horse, and lion. Dr. Vincent Smith and others have interpreted these symbols as representing the four cardinal points, but they have missed the essential point—their connection with the four gates of the Mānasarovara lake, the supposed outlets of the four sacred rivers.

At first sight there is nothing in this capital to suggest a lotus flower, or the seed vessel of the lotus. But the art historian must always remember that a craftsman frequently reproduces a traditional pattern without knowing its original meaning, and therefore in tracing the history of a particular motif one must expect to find many variations, especially when, as in this case, we find a foreign craftsman reproducing a motif which is unfamiliar to him.

We shall find the same motif frequently repeated in vernacular Indian art and there the native craftsman nearly always keeps in mind its connection with the lotus flower. Pl. IV shows the whole pillar as it is carved upon the railing of the Sānchī *stūpa*. On the summit is the Wheel of the Law supported by the four heraldic lions. The abacus upon which the lions stand is ornamented with small lotus petals, and underneath it on either side there springs a lotus bud, the stalks of the lotus being hung with garlands; the large bell-shaped member is also decorated with, or rather made up of, lotus petals bent downwards.

Between the abacus and this " bell-shaped " member is a small ovolo moulding, as in the Sarnāth capital, with regular indentations indicating the numerous compartments of the seed vessel of the white or blue lotus (Fig. 5B) radiating from the centre like the spokes of a wheel.

Let us take another illustration from vernacular Indian art which explains this so-called bell. It is not meant for an ordinary bell, but for a cluster of petals of the lotus flower when they are turned down upon the stalk. Fig. 3 shows a small pillar of the same type carved upon some of the reliefs of the Barhut stūpa, and Fig. 4 a representation of one of the natural flowers when the petals begin to fade and to curve down over the stalk, leaving the half-ripened seed-vessel of the lotus exposed. Then the petals form a bell-shaped cluster such as the sculptor of the capital is trying to represent. Only in this capital the lotus is not the pink or rose lotus (*Nelumbium speciosum*)

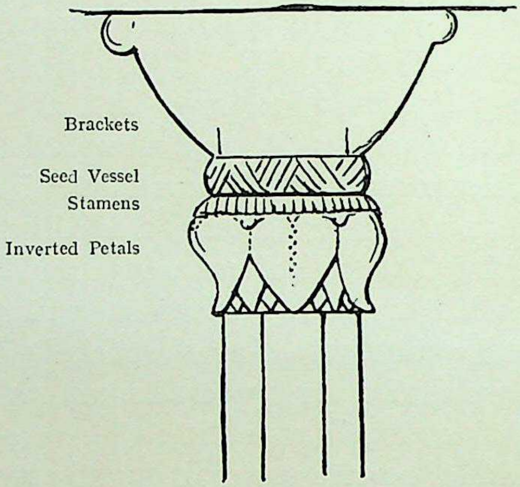
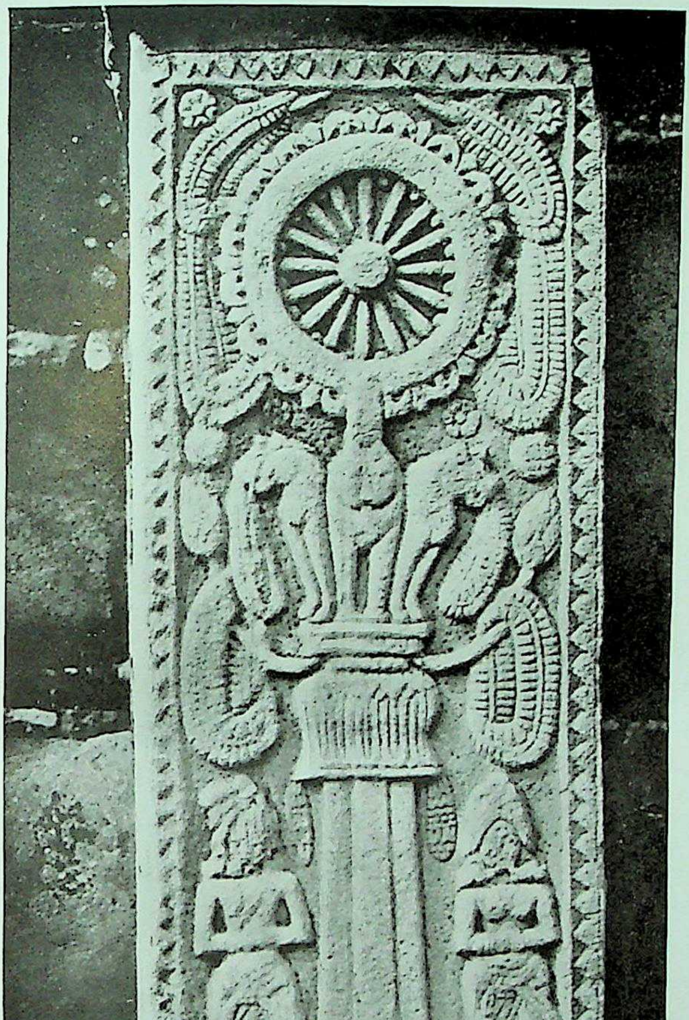


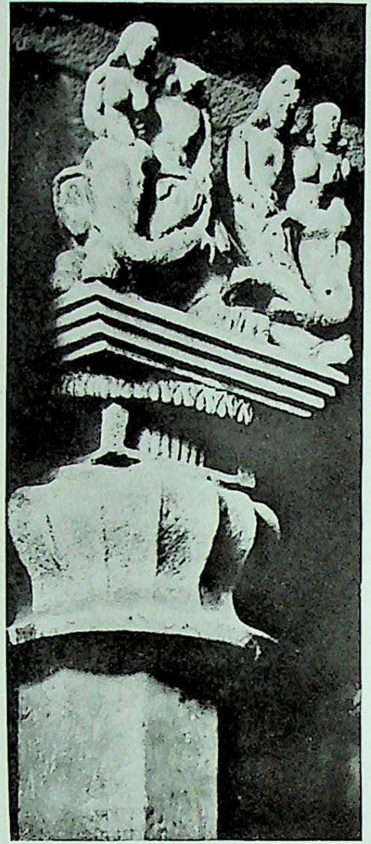
FIG. 3.—PILLAR OF THE WORLD LOTUS, BARHUT RELIEF.

PLATE IV



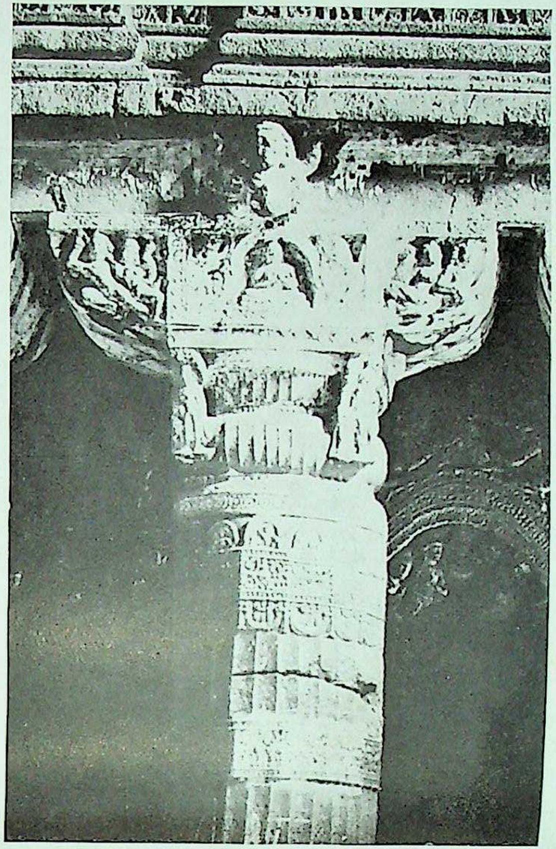
THE PILLAR OF THE WORLD LOTUS, SĀNCHĪ.

Plate Va



THE PILLAR OF THE WORLD LOTUS, KĀRLĪ.

Plate Vb



THE PILLAR OF THE WORLD LOTUS, AJANTĀ.

which has a fruit like an inverted cone, but the melon-shaped fruit of the white or blue water-lily shown in Fig. 5A.

The shaft of the pillar (Fig. 3) then stands for the stalk of the flower : the bell-shaped member is made up of the petals and stamens : the indented ovolo moulding above, which is generally made much more important than it is here, is the seed vessel of the white or blue lotus. Above this again is the bracket or super-capital which supports the cross-beams of the roof.

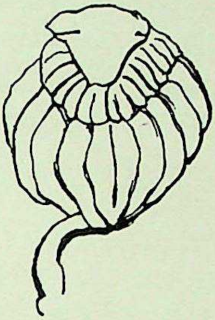


FIG. 4.—LOTUS FLOWER WITH INVERTED PETALS, BARHUT RELIEF.

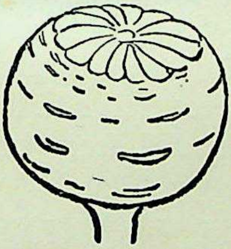


FIG. 5A.—SEED VESSEL OF WHITE LOTUS.

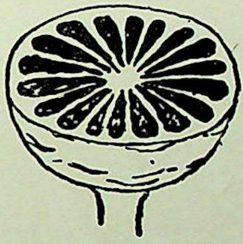
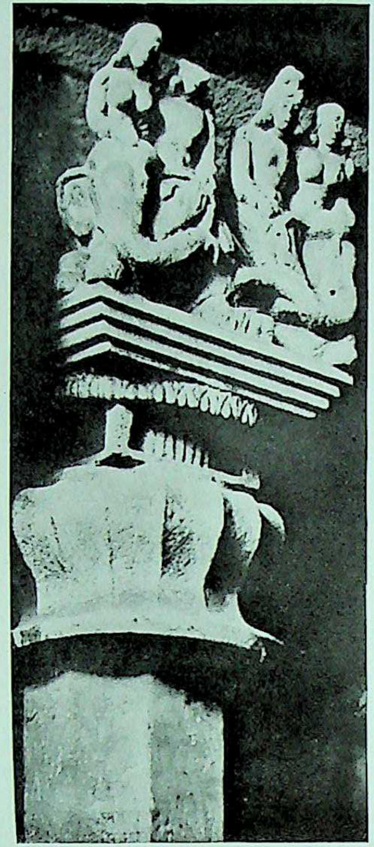


FIG. 5B.—SECTION SHOWING WHEEL.

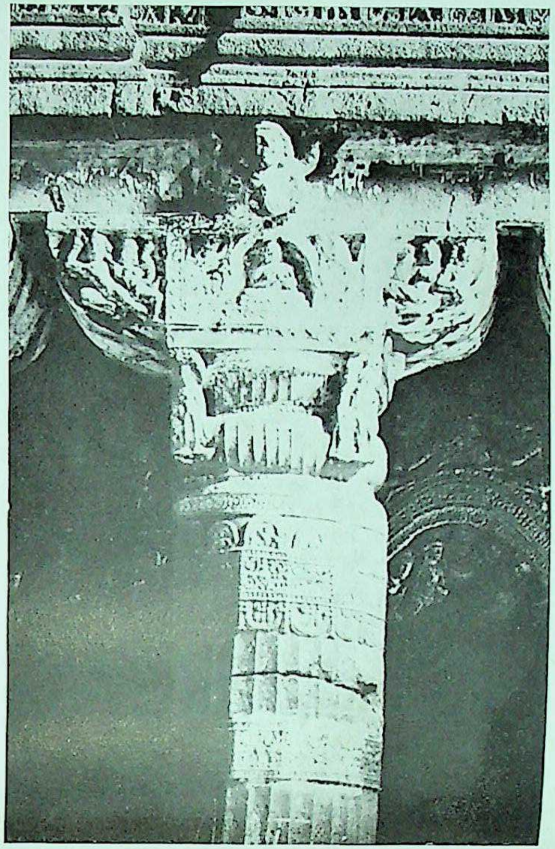
In other early examples, as in the pillars of the great rock-cut chapter house at Kārlī (Pl. VA), the lower turned-down petals are again highly conventionalised, as in the Sarnāth capital, so that their

Plate Va



THE PILLAR OF THE WORLD LOTUS, KĀRLĪ.

Plate Vb



THE PILLAR OF THE WORLD LOTUS, AJANTĀ.

which has a fruit like an inverted cone, but the melon-shaped fruit of the white or blue water-lily shown in Fig. 5A.

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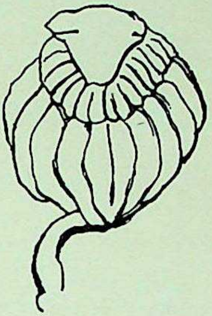


FIG. 4.—LOTUS FLOWER WITH INVERTED PETALS, BARHUT RELIEF.

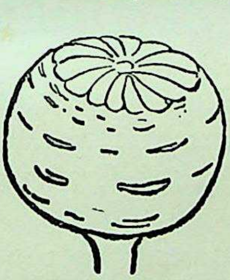


FIG. 5A.—SEED VESSEL OF WHITE LOTUS.

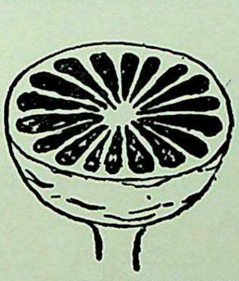


FIG. 5B.—SECTION SHOWING WHEEL.

In other early examples, as in the pillars of the great rock-cut chapter house at Kārlī (Pl. VA), the lower turned-down petals are again highly conventionalised, as in the Sarnāth capital, so that their identity with the lotus flower is less clear. But on the other hand the seed vessel of the lotus, which symbolises Brahmā's mystic temple or holy city at Lake Mānasarovara, is made much more conspicuous. It is enclosed in a quadrangular shrine, open on all four sides, the openings representing the four " gates " of the lake. Above this shrine the up-turned petals of the flower symbolising the Himalayan snow-peaks are very clearly indicated. On the summit of the capital, instead of the Wheel of the Law, are four Buddhist divinities mounted on kneeling elephants. We need not stop to enquire what particular place in Buddhist iconography these Devas occupy. The intention of the sculptor is clear enough. They are some of the inhabitants of the heavenly spheres which rise from the summit of the World Lotus at Mt. Kailāsa.

The Mahānirvāna Tantra gives the mystic meaning of this lotus symbolism. The root, it says, is Brahman, the Unknowable, from which all creation springs. The stalk is Māyā, the unreality of world phenomena. The flower is the world itself. The fruit is Moksha, the soul-liberation when it is released from worldly desires.

To understand this symbolism and to recognise its connection objectively with the Himalayan World Lotus, and metaphysically with the philosophy of Buddhism and Hinduism, is to add very much to the interest of the Indian order of architecture, for if the student fails to follow the inner working of the Indian mind he is not likely to enjoy or appreciate Indian art æsthetically. And when this symbolism is understood we must abandon the theory that the Indian order dates from Asoka's time, and is therefore only a debased copy of a foreign pattern which had no meaning for Indian craftsmen, except that it had been used by Persian royalty. The meaning of the Sarnāth column—the World Lotus surmounted by the Wheel—was to proclaim the universal dominion of the Law of Buddha. Its connection with the Lake Mānasarovara and with Buddhist metaphysical ideas stamps it with a distinctively Indian character. It shows also that the motive power behind the beginnings of Indian art, as we know them, was the same Vedic inspiration which has dominated all the higher aspects of Indian culture throughout history.

It is true that there is some similarity between the design of Asokan pillars and those found at Persepolis. In Egyptian art, also, a lotus flower was used as a symbol for the remote mountains of Upper Egypt, in which the sources of the Nile lay hidden. This seems to suggest that the culture of Vedic times was very widespread and extended from the Himalayas to the valley of the Nile. But I will not venture to discuss whether the original centre of the World Lotus was in the Himalayas or in the mountains of Upper Egypt or elsewhere. It is sufficient for the understanding of Indian art to know that for Indian thinkers it was the Lake Mānasarovara, where Brahmā, the Creator, placed his throne.

It will be interesting to see how the design of the pillar of the World Lotus became modified in later Indian art. At Ajantā, some six or seven centuries after Asoka's time, the original symbolism of the World Lotus is hardly recognisable (Pl. Vb). The conspicuous turned-down petals of the lotus which formed the "bell" in the older capitals have disappeared and the seed-vessel with the up-turned petals resembles a sacrificial water-vessel, the lota. Yet there are reminiscences of the four "gates" in the four ornaments which mark the corners of the capital, and there is sufficient resemblance in the whole design to show the derivation of the capital from the earlier type. The transformation of the lotus fruit into a water-vessel was a very natural and obvious one, seeing that the lotus fruit itself was a symbol for the sacred lake at Kailāsa. Another variation (Fig. 6) is when the water-vessel becomes a vase of plenty with sprays of lotus buds forming the four corners.

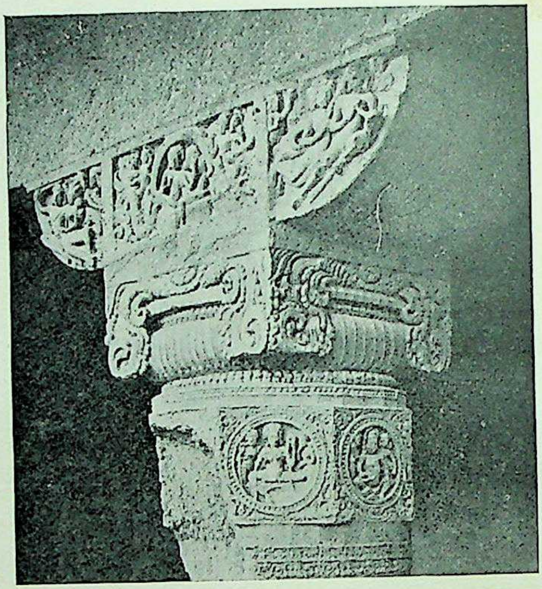
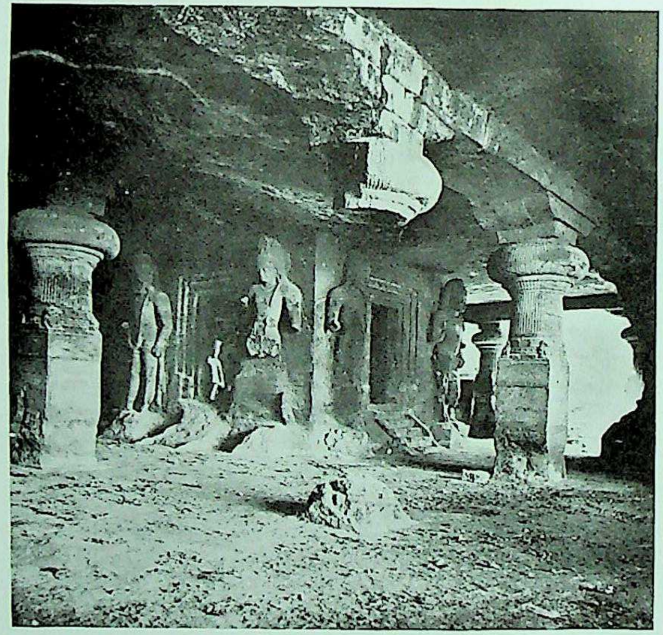


Fig. 6.—PILLAR OF THE WORLD LOTUS, AJANTĀ.

In the massive pillars of the great rock-cut temple of Elephanta (Fig. 7), the whole design is simplified

Plate VIa



BRAHMĀ'S SHRINE, ELEPHANTA.

Plate VIb

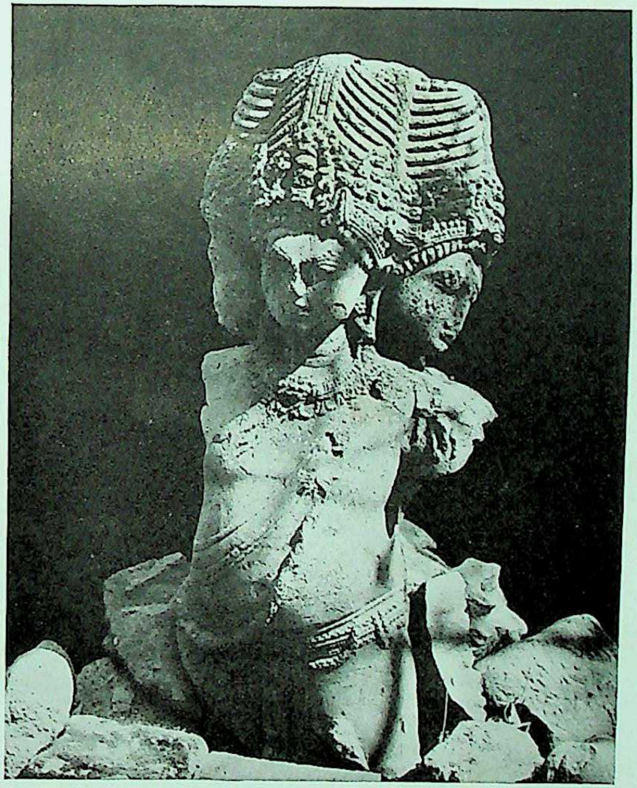


IMAGE OF BRAHMĀ, ELEPHANTA.

and the seed-vessel of the lotus becomes the principal member of the capital. But here Brahmā, the Creator, whose seat is at Kailāsa, has a shrine (Pl. VIA) dedicated to his especial worship, a cubical cell with four gates guarded by eight colossal Devas, probably meant for the Prajāpātis, the eight lords of creation. At the present time the cell is occupied by Siva's phallic symbol, the lingam, which was probably put there in modern times because it was less offensive to Muhammadan feelings than an anthropomorphic image. But originally the cell was designed for the splendid image of Brahmā (Pl. VIB), one of the noblest creations of Hindu art, which was thrown down and mutilated by some fanatical iconoclasts. The four heads probably symbolise the four world rivers which flow from the Creator's holy city at Kailāsa, for every

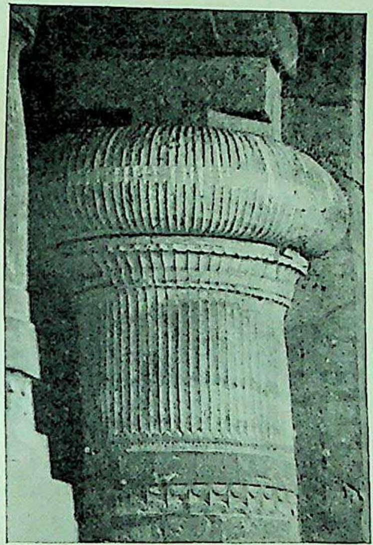


FIG. 7.—PILLAR OF THE WORLD LOTUS, ELEPHANTA.

Indian craftsman instinctively associates the functions of the Creator with the holy rivers whose sources lie in the centre of the World Lotus.

Brahmā, however, must not be thought of as a purely naturalistic concept connected with lakes and the sources of rivers, though this may have been the original derivation. Mānasarovara means the Lake of the Mind (Manas). The creative force is thought, as expressed by the Mantras formulated in the Brahmānical sacrificial system. Sarasvatī, Brahmā's consort, the Lady of the Lake (*Saras*), represents Vāc, or speech, as well as musical, artistic, and literary creation. Brahmā, metaphysically, was the active, or rājasic, manifestation of the trinity of cosmic qualities —*Sattvam, Rajas, and Tamas*—which had its centre in the seed-vessel of the World Lotus.

CHAPTER II

INDIAN PILGRIMAGES

THE previous chapter will have given some idea of the wonders of the great central shrine of Hinduism at Kailāsa, in the heart of the Himalayas, and of the impressions which they made upon early Indian religious ritual and art. The fact that this shrine was extraordinarily difficult of access added to its mystery and to the fascination which it exercised, and still exercises, upon the Indian mind. Kawaguchi, in his graphic description of the pilgrim's progress to Kailāsa, says that the outermost circuit of the mountain is the easiest one, but it is nevertheless a break-neck journey of 50 miles. The middle route is so steep that ordinary persons hardly ever dare to try it. Not infrequently pilgrims who boldly attempt this most perilous journey are killed by snow-slips. The innermost circuit is regarded as only fit for supernatural beings.

The veneration in which Kailāsa is held as the Creator's shrine has been shared by nearly every school of Indian religious thought from a remote antiquity to the present day. It was natural, therefore, that, as the Indo-Aryans spread farther south, their ritual began to demand the recognition of other places of worship more accessible and less perilous than Kailāsa itself, yet endowed by the Creator's hand with some of the virtues which made Kailāsa the holiest spot on earth.

Hindu mythology explains in its own symbolic way the historical evolution of Indian religion. The method is illustrated in the story of Siva's wife, Satī, the apotheosis of purity and devotion, who is the Himalayan Snow-goddess, Pārvatī, idealised. When Satī dies of shame from the insults heaped upon her liege lord at Daksha's marriage feast, Siva, drunk with sorrow, strides about the earth all-destroying, bearing her dead body on his back. The soil is dried up, the plants wither, harvests fail. All nature shudders over the grief of the Great God. Then Vishnu, to save mankind, comes up behind Siva and hurling his discus time after time, cuts the body of Satī to pieces, till the Great God, conscious that the weight is gone, retires alone to Kailāsa to lose himself once more in his eternal meditation. But the body of Satī is hewn into fifty-two pieces, and wherever a fragment touches the earth a new shrine is established and Siva himself shines before the supplicant as the guardian of that spot.[1]

One of the most celebrated of these fifty-two *tirths*, literally fords, by which the pilgrim can pass over the river of re-birth into the bliss of Nirvāna, is at Ellora in the dominions of the Nizām of Hyderabad. By following Kawaguchi's description of Kailāsa, and comparing it with Pauranic mythology, it is not difficult to recognise the natural phenomenon which made Ellora one of these holy *tirths*. The Ganges, according to the Pauranic myth, is said to fall down from heaven upon Siva's head at Kailāsa. Kawaguchi, being a Buddhist and a native of Japan, was not specially interested in Pauranic mythology, but his description of the grand waterfalls (Fig. 8), which he passed on his circuit of Kailāsa, is a most illuminating commentary on the Indian myth of the birth of the Ganges :

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[1] *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*, Sister Nivedita, p. 294. For the symbolism of the number fifty-two see below, p. 70.

" From the crevices and narrow grooves between

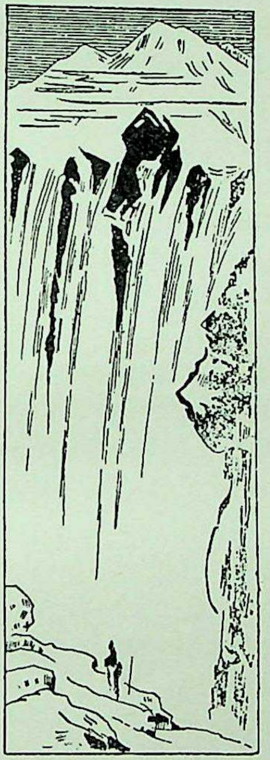

Fig. 8.—WATERFALLS AT MT. KAILĀSA.
(*Drawn by Ekai Kawaguchi.*)

these towering rocks shoot down several cascades as much as a thousand feet in height. There are quite a number of them, but only seven are really large. These seven waterfalls have each a distinct individuality. Some shoot down with great force and look not unlike the fabulous dragon descending the rock, while others look milder and may be compared to a white sheet suspended over the rock. I sat down in rapture at the sight and felt as if I had been transported to some heavenly place!"[1]

Every Indian pilgrim would feel the same devotional rapture, but instead of the mysterious dragon of Chinese mythology he would see in these grand cascades thundering down the rocks of Kailāsa the descent of Gangā from Brahmā's heaven when she threw herself down in seven streams upon Siva's brow to wash away the sins of the sons of Sagara. The myth of Ganga's celestial birth is undoubtedly inspired by the sight of the seven great waterfalls of Mt. Kailāsa:

> "Bright Gangā falling with her heavenly waves
> Himalaya's head with sacred water laves,
> Bearing the flowers the seven great sages[2] fling
> To crown the forehead of the mountain king."

So sings Kalidāsa in the Kumara Sambhava.

Fig. 9 shows the great waterfall at Ellora and explains why the place suggested itself to the Indian mystic as a fragment of the holy mountain at Kailāsa. Over a lofty scarp of rock there falls in the rainy season a glorious cascade which, gleaming in the setting sun, reflects a milder but not less wonderful aspect of the divine Creator's face. Behind the fall the cliff is hollowed into a natural arcade, and along a wide ledge of rock a procession of pilgrims passes to bathe in the spray which Gangā showers upon them in her descent from heaven, for though Kailāsa is a thousand miles away, here is another birth of the same holy stream which falls from heaven upon Siva's head.

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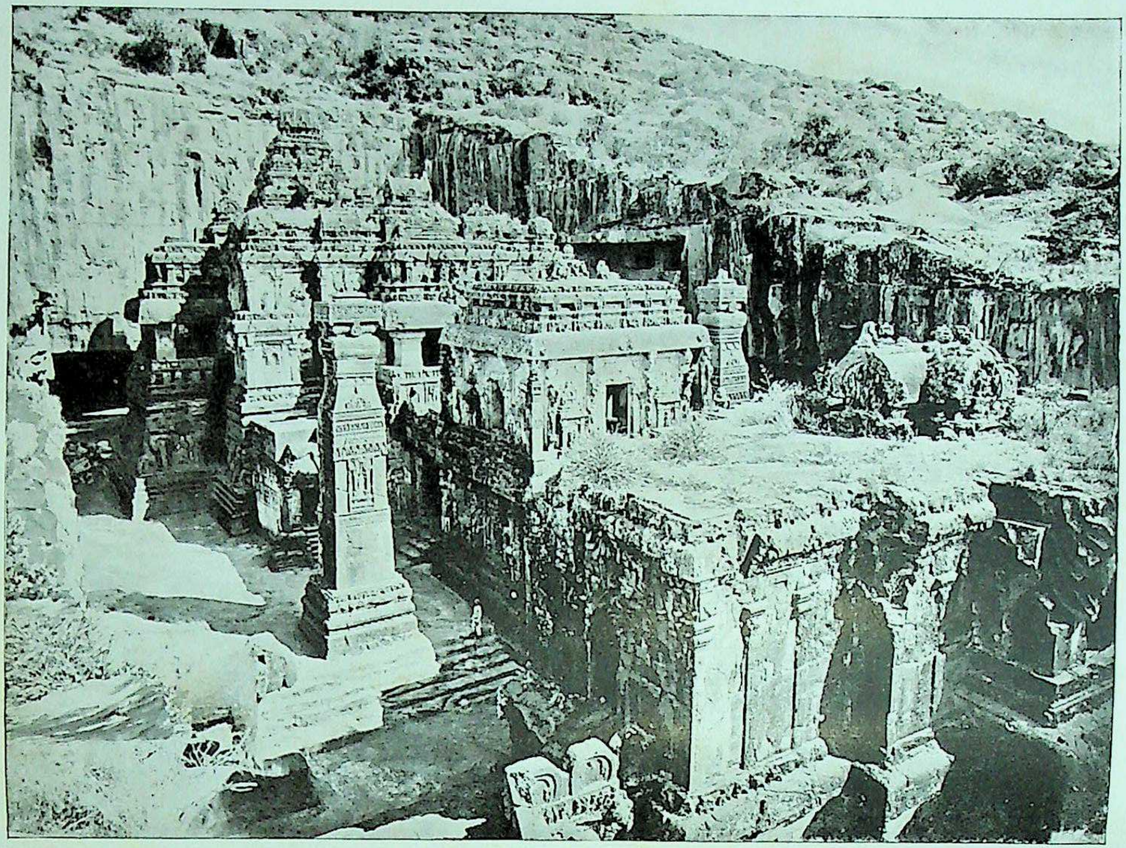
[1] *Three Years in Tibet*, p. 170.

[2] The seven Rishis representing the seven planets of the Great Bear.

PLATE VII



THE KAILĀSA TEMPLE, ELLORA.

And as you go along the road, passing temple after temple and monastery after monastery which successive generations of devotees have hewn in the living rock, you will come, wonderful to relate, to Kailāsa itself (Pl. VII), a glittering temple cut out of the face of the cliff, the sight of which is meant to transport the worshipper to the Great God's Himalayan shrine. If the side elevation of the Ellora temple (Pl. VIIIB) is compared with the actual skyline of Kailāsa (Pl. VIIIA), as shown in a photograph, it will be obvious that the temple designer was not relying upon his imagination only. He himself must have performed

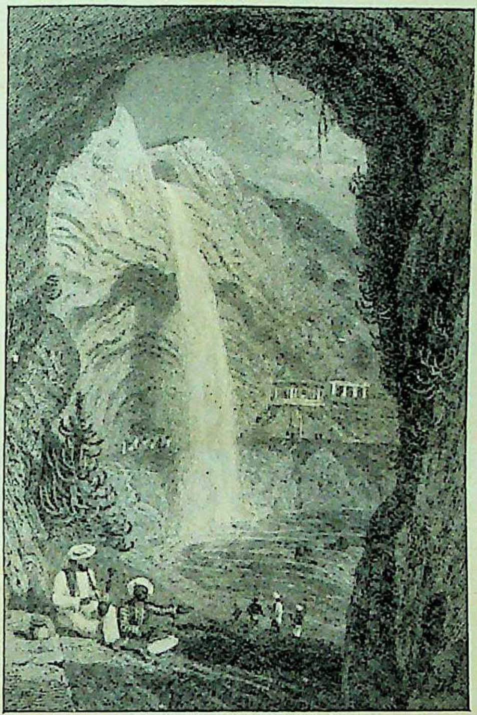


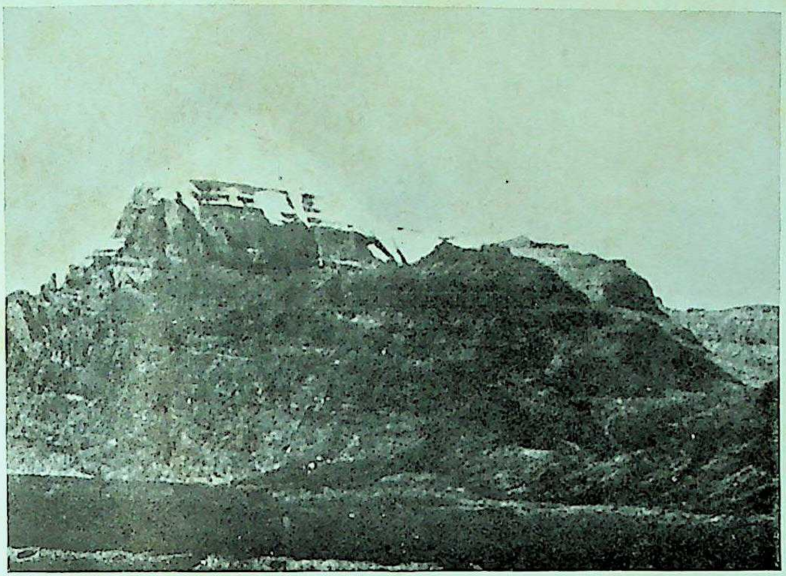
FIG. 9.—WATERFALL, ELLORA.
(*From an engraving by F. J. Havell, after a drawing by W. Havell* (1782–1857).)

the greatest of all pilgrimages, and his intention was to reproduce architecturally the exact build-up of the holy mountain. The pyramidal snow-cap, which suggested to the pilgrim the roof of the Divine Yogi's cell, is echoed in the domed canopy of the temple's holy of holies (*garbha-griha*). Pārvatī's shrine behind it represents one of the low-pointed rocks below Kailāsa ; the two-storied mandapam stands for the great rocky scarp which forms the approach to the mountain peak.

Originally the whole exterior of the temple was plastered over with a coating of fine polished chunam, so that it glittered dazzling white in the sunshine like the snow-peaks of Kailāsa. Everything that art can do is done to suggest to the imagination that this is truly a fragment of the snow-goddess's own body which fell to earth as Siva bore it mournfully across the sky, so that every pilgrim to Ellora's *tirth* might gain the merit of worshipping at Kailāsa itself. The virtue of that holy mountain was said to be so great that in the epic war between Rāma and the demon king of Lanka, when Rāvana was worsted in the fight, he flew in his magic car to Kailāsa and began to burrow a hole beneath the rock in order that he might transport it bodily to his stronghold and use the divine power against his adversary. Pārvatī feels the mountain quake, and clutches Siva's arm to rouse him from his meditation. But the Great God, who was not to be coerced by the ten-armed demon's magic, only pressed down his foot and imprisoned Rāvana in his self-made dungeon, where he remained a thousand years until by penitence he gained release.

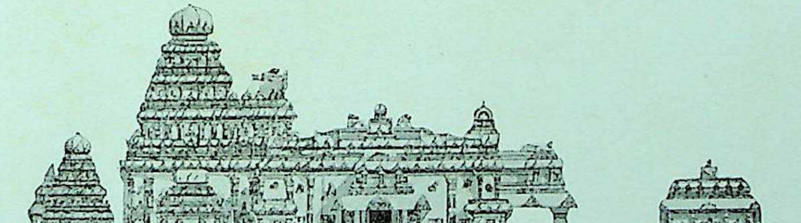
The great bas-relief (Pl. IXA) representing this

Plate VIIIa



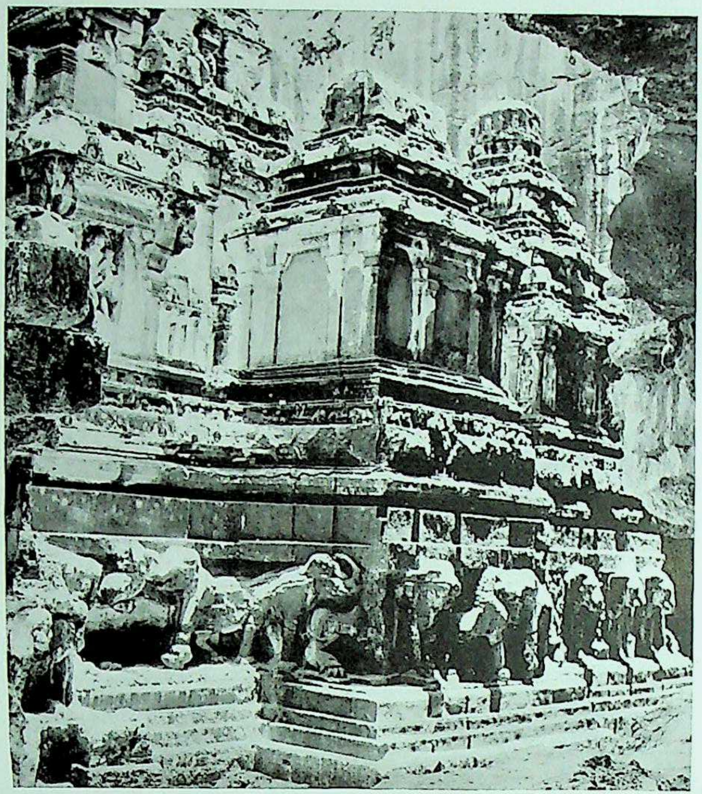
MOUNT KAILĀSA.

Plate VIIIb



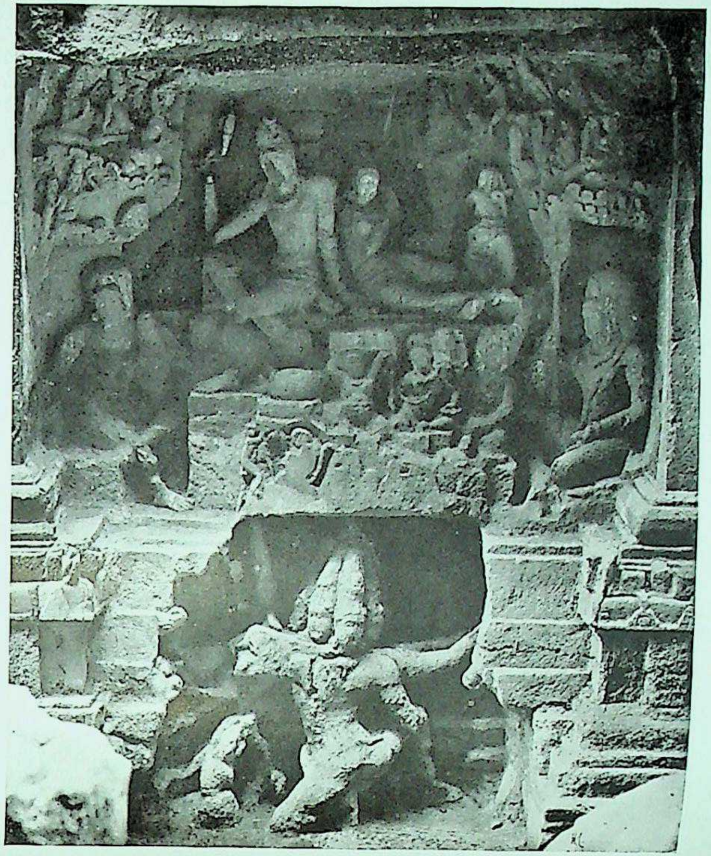
KAILĀSA TEMPLE, ELLORA (SIDE ELEVATION).

PLATE IXA



THE KAILĀSA TEMPLE, ELLORA.
(Plinth of Elephants.)

PLATE IXB



RAVANA UNDER KAILĀSA.
(Ellora Sculpture.)

legend, which is carved on the base of the mandapam at Ellora, shows Indian sculpture at its best. The technique and delightful contrasts of relief remind one of the art of the great French sculptor Rodin, who had the most enthusiastic admiration for the classics of Indian art. How Rodin's genius would have revelled in the opportunities these Indian sculptors had of playing with such colossal masses of living rock!

But perhaps the greatest *tour de force* in the temple sculpture is the magnificent plinth running round the base and carved in bold relief with a great herd of elephants supporting the temple on their backs (Pl. IXB). Here again the symbolism goes back to the natural phenomena of the Himalayas. The elephant is the rain-cloud. Kalidāsa in the Meghaduta addresses the rain-cloud as Indra's chief officer. Anyone who knows the Himalayas will have observed the low-lying banks of clouds which often gather below the highest peaks, so that the mountain-tops appear like islands in a milky sea. At Ellora the sculptor's poetic fancy likens the clouds to Indra's, the rain god's, elephants bearing the holy mountain on their backs.

Pl. VII gives a general view of the Kailāsa temple. It was made by quarrying a pit down from the top of the cliff from 50 to 100 feet in depth, 250 feet in length, and 160 feet in width, and carving in the centre of it a full-size two-storied temple to represent the far-distant Himalayan shrine with all its fantastic imagery and natural wonders. One might expect to find some symbolic suggestion of Brahmā's sacred lake with its four gates. It is given here in a two-storied shrine, facing the temple entrance, the upper story containing a cubical cell, like that at Elephanta (Pl. VIA), with an open door on each side. But the place of Brahmā's image is taken by Nandi, Siva's bull, one of the most ancient symbols of procreation. A Babylonian legend declared that humanity was born under the sign of Taurus.

The pilgrim who circumambulates the temple comes first, as he would in the outer circuit of Kailāsa itself, to the shrine of the sacred rivers. Only instead of the seven waterfalls which pour down from the heights of Kailāsa he sees the beautiful two-storied temple cut out of the rock (Fig. 10), dedicated to the river-goddesses who are associated with Kailāsa and its lakes. The Ganges goddess, standing on a crocodile, occupies the centre. On her right Sarasvatī has a lotus for her footstool, and on her left the Jumna stands on a tortoise. After worshipping at this shrine the pilgrim passes along the ambulatory carved out of the rocky walls of the courtyard through a sculptured gallery of goddesses, the Sapta-matris, or Seven Mothers of Creation, perhaps suggested by the seven great waterfalls described by Kawaguchi.

The Kailāsa temple was begun about the middle of the eighth century A.D., under the patronage of the Rāshtrakuta king of the Deccan, Krishna I. Though as a technical achievement it is almost unique, the design of the temple followed a tradition of great antiquity which had its roots in Vedic times. Its original prototype was the simple thatched hut of the forest hermitage or *āshrama*, which Kailāsa's peak resembles. For many centuries, probably, the only Saiva shrines, besides Kailāsa itself, were huts of this description where the Brahman guru taught his disciples the esoteric doctrines of the Upanishads and kept the symbols of his cult. When Brahmanical influence revived, after the decline of Buddhism, and its priesthood won again the patronage of powerful kings and wealthy merchants, the latter followed the example which Asoka and other great Buddhist propagandists had set and employed the royal craftsmen to honour the Divine Guru who dwelt in his icy hermitage at Kailāsa. Thus the royal shrines of the Saiva cult, like the stūpas and chapter-houses of the Buddhist Sangha, grew more and more elaborate and costly

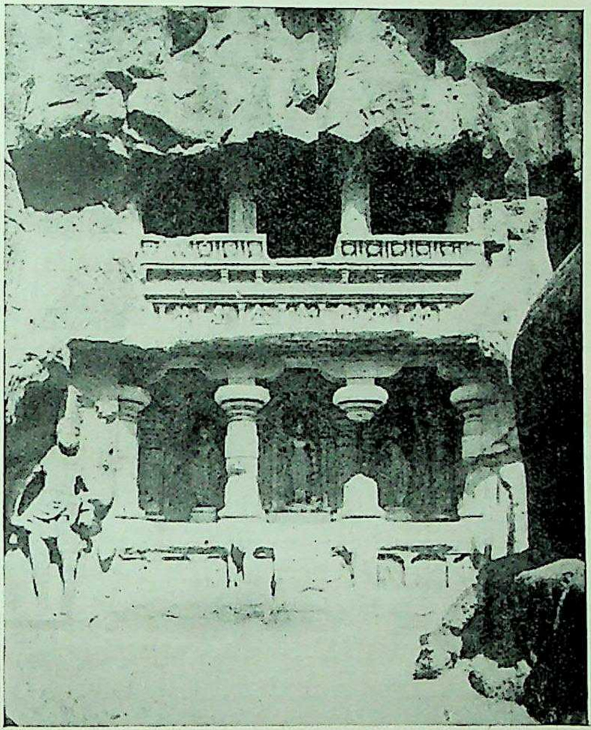


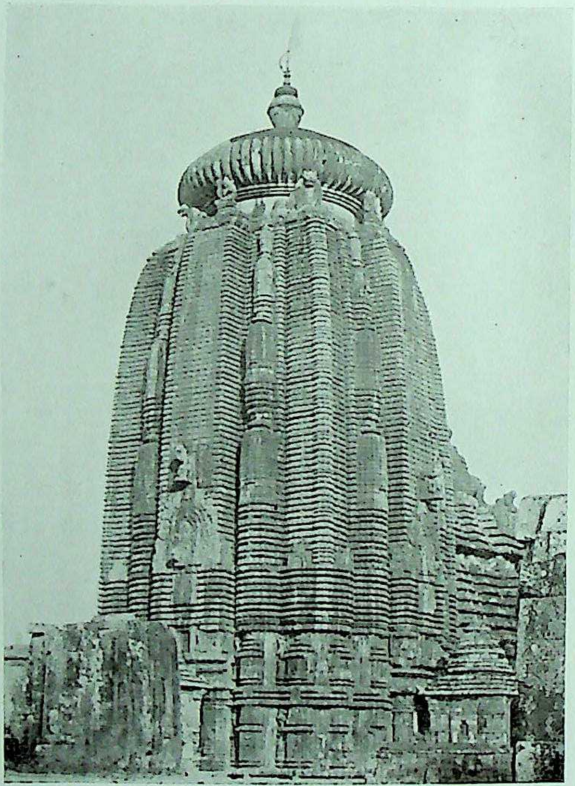
FIG. 10.—SHRINE OF RIVER-GODDESSES, ELLORA.

until they reached the splendid climax of the Kailāsa temple at Ellora.

Fergusson in his classification of Indian architecture led archæological research into a blind alley by labelling this type of temple "Dravidian," and by making an ethnographical distinction between it and the tall curvilinear spired temple which he called "Indo-Aryan." These two academic labels are misleading because, although the Saiva or Dravidian type of temple is now mostly found in Southern India, it is just as much Indo-Aryan as the other one, which is mostly found in the North. In the present day the Saiva cults predominate in Southern India and the Vaishnava cults in the North, but they are only different groups of Indo-Aryan religious schools which had their common starting point in the teaching of the Vedic āshramas.

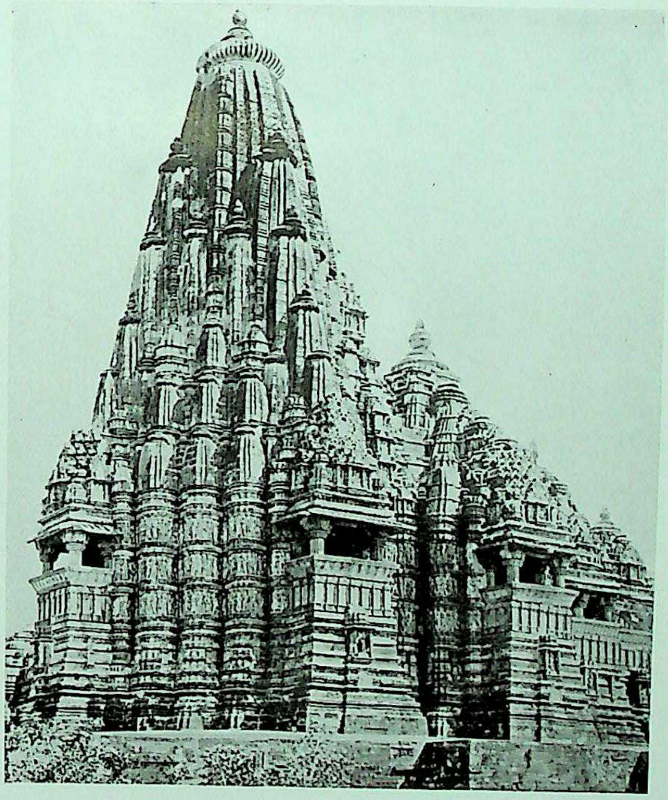
The curvilinear temple spire (Pl. X) is no doubt derived from bambu construction, the form being exactly like that of a tall hut with four or eight bambu ribs bent inwards, fastened at the top to a central pole and stiffened by horizontal bambus lashed to the others at regular intervals. The covering of such a hut would be of skin or thatch. An inverted water-pot crowned the summit to prevent the percolation of rain and to allow the smoke from the fire-hearth to escape. Huts of this form are found in Bengal at the present day, but they are used more for ceremonial than for domestic purposes, chiefly for the upper framework of processional cars in which temple images are exhibited at popular festivals. This tradition probably comes down from Vedic times, when the warrior's car was frequently used for sacrificial purposes.

PLATE XA



SIKHARA OF LINGA RAJ TEMPLE, BHUVANESHWAR.

PLATE XB



TEMPLE SIKHARA, KHAJURAHO.

Stone-built temple spires in Northern India are sometimes conical in shape, closely resembling the conical mud huts of villages in Mesopotamia at the present day. Huts of this description are sculptured on one of the reliefs of Sennacharib's palace at Nineveh discovered by Layard. I have suggested that the Indo-Aryans may have used such a hut in the Vedic fire ritual, a tall conical hut with vents at the top being obviously the most practical, especially in the rainy season, for sacrificial ritual in which fire plays the principal part. The use of bambu instead of tree branches in its construction would naturally follow the introduction of the Aryan fire ritual into India. It is not therefore a far-fetched speculation that the Indian curvilinear temple spire is derived from the conical mud huts of Persia and Mesopotamia, or from similar huts of skin or thatch used by the Aryan forest dwellers.

We have seen that in the Saiva cult the holy mountain was thought of architecturally as a shrine for the god, and also personified as the god himself, that is, Mt. Kailāsa contains both Siva's hermitage and Siva himself. The same ideas occur in the Vaishnava cults with regard to Vishnu. Kalidāsa in the Kumara-Sambhava puts these words into the mouth of one of the seven Rishis who came to Himalaya to ask his consent to the marriage of his daughter Umā with the Hermit of Kailāsa :

> " Thy mind is lofty as thy summits are
> Sages say truly, Vishnu is thy name :
> His spirit breathed in thy mountain frame
> Within the caverns of thy boundless breast
> All things that move and all that move not rest."

Here the poet dwells on a different aspect of the Himalayas. They were the source of all life, but they represented also the static power which preserves life. They were planted firmly in the centre of the earth as the pillar which supports the heavens, like the pole which supported the Aryan chieftain's hut. We have seen how this idea was symbolised in Asokan pillars and in Indian temple architecture. Siva, creating the world by the power of thought, was seated like a Yogi in his forest cell. Vishnu, upholding the heavens and preserving the balance between the opposing forces of evolution and involution, was a tall, erect figure with a rigidly symmetrical pose, armed like the Aryan warrior with bow and arrows, sword and mace, for he represented law and order in the universe.

Now the Indian craftsman always associates the tall curvilinear temple spire with Vishnu's mystic mountain, Meru. There were apparently two reasons for this. First, that it was the most suitable for a colossal upright image, and secondly, because it was derived from the primitive Aryan warrior's hut, just as the Saiva type of temple was derived from the Brahman Yogi's forest cell. The original cleavage between the two main schools of modern Hinduism, the Saivas and Vaishnavas, came from the religious rivalries between the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas, the priestly and warrior classes, the Saivas representing orthodox Brahmanical teaching and the Vaishnavas the teaching of different Kshatriya thinkers who held independent views. But it is necessary to understand that there is now no hard-and-fast ritualistic distinction

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[1] See *Handbook of Indian Art*, by the author, Pl. LX, A.

between Saiva and Vaishnava temples. A Saiva image or symbol may be worshipped under a Vishnu sikhara, and a Vaishnava image will be placed in a so-called "Dravidian" shrine. The two types of temples, the one found mostly in Southern India and the other in the North, have this in common that they are both symbols of Nature's own Himalayan shrine which is the cathedral church for all Hindu India. The Saiva temple represents a particular mountain, Kailāsa; the Vaishnava temple is a symbol for the mythical mountain, Meru, which may be considered as a synthetic expression for the whole mass of the Himalayas, regarded as a mystic mountain connecting earth and heaven.

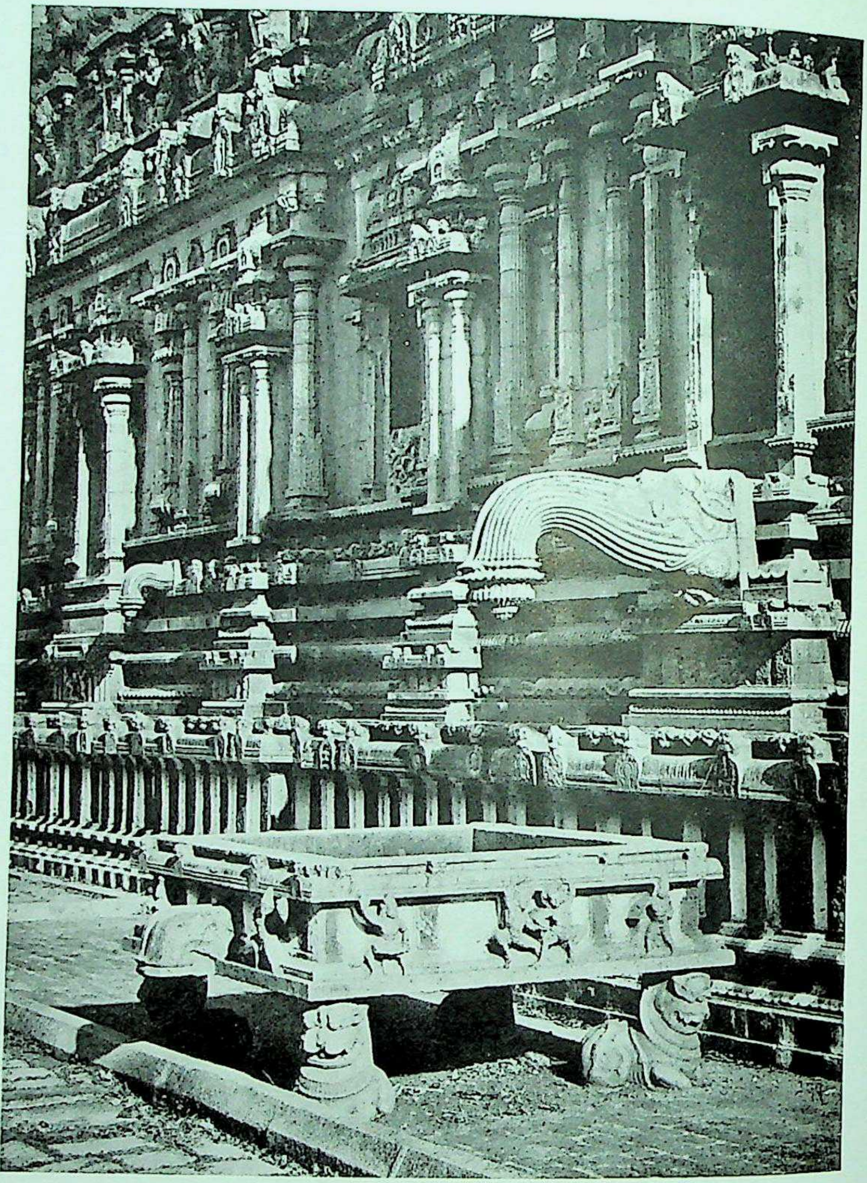
The design of Meru temples, like that of the Kailāsa type, ranges from a simple wayside shrine which approaches nearest to its prototype, the primitive bambu hut, up to elaborate and lofty spires like those of Khajurāho, in whose massive and fantastic contours the builders try to suggest the majestic peaks which tower over the plains of Hindustan. Every sikhara has a large melon-shaped coping stone, called the *amalaka* (Pl. XA), the symbol of purity, in which can be easily recognised again the seed-vessel of the lotus—the motif used in the World Pillar. In this case it is the seed of the blue lotus, or water-lily, Vishnu's especial flower.

Structurally the amalaka represented the fastenings, probably in the form of a wheel, which bound the original bambu ribs to the central pole, and the inverted water-pot which kept out the rain in the primitive hut. The finial of the spire in the form of a lota, or sacrificial water-vessel, is not often intact because it was usually made of gold or gilt copper, and was a tempting object of loot. This lota stood for the precious jar containing the elixir of life which Lakshmī, with Vishnu's help, brought up from the depths in the Churning of the Ocean.

The steeple of the Linga-rāj temple at Bhuvaneshvar (Pl. XA), over 180 feet in height, is distinguished for its superb masonry and for its purity of outline. It is dated about the ninth or tenth century A.D., but it may be earlier. The lotus symbolism of the amalaka, which always crowns the spire, is sometimes emphasised by giving a circular plan to the shrine itself (vimāna), and by indenting the walls to suggest the outline of the flower. But as a rule the shrine is square in plan, as it is in the Bhuvaneshvar temples, the spire itself being the great four-petalled lotus of the world which forms the motif of the Indian lotus pillar.

The Indian craftsman finds full scope for his inventive genius and technical skill in the design and decoration of this mountain symbol. But to illustrate all the varieties of the Vishnu temple would require a separate monograph. The temples of Khajurāho in Bundelkhand represent the climax in elaboration. The stately Kandarya Mahadeva temple (Pl. XB) shows how the simple contours of the earlier Vishnu shrines were broken up and embellished with the same fantasy and skill which several centuries later were lavished upon the Gothic cathedrals of Europe. The whole temple is raised on a stone terrace nearly 30 feet high. It has entrances at the four cardinal points, like the Brahmā shrine at Elephanta. The tall central spire, 88 feet high, is heavily buttressed on each face

PLATE XI



A SOUTH INDIAN TEMPLE.

(Showing the Datura Flower Gargoyles.)

and at the four corners by smaller spires of the same form, as if the builders, like the sculptors of Ellora, had in mind some grand natural pinnacle of rock carved symmetrically by Viçvakarma, the Devas' master-builder.

Before passing to another subject I will discuss briefly an alternative theory of the origin of the temple sikhara. It has been suggested that, because the images of Vishnu are sometimes crowned with a high-peaked tiara, or *mukuta*, resembling the temple spire in shape, therefore the spire itself is only an architectural reproduction of the head-gear of the deity. This point of view might be accepted only if there is a clear understanding of what the image symbolises. The Vishnu image, like the Siva image, represents a personification of the mountain, such as Kalidāsa makes in his poetry, and if we regard the summit of Mt. Meru as Vishnu's *mukuta*, in the same way as the snow-cap of Kailāsa is Siva's *mukuta*, then the spire of the Vishnu temple may be said to be derived from the crown of the image. But it is essential to recognise the mental image of which the graven image is the likeness. To understand the iconography both of Siva and of Vishnu, we must go back to the primitive mountain worship which was its starting point. The Siva image is white because the mountain is a snow-mountain. He is the blue-necked god because a snow-peak seen from a distance often appears with a band of violet-blue haze just below the snow-line. The god manifested himself in the mountain and his shrine was the mountain itself. Therefore the temple builders made Siva's shrine an architectonic model of Mt. Kailāsa in which they saw the hut of the Divine Yogi of the universe. Vishnu's paradise was also a mountain, though an imaginary one, and by an easy transition of thought the builders took another type of hut as the model for his earthly shrine. Probably it was an Aryan chieftain's own hut or tent, a more stately structure than that of the forest hermit, for Vishnu was the symbol of law and order in the universe and the Aryan king was his vicegerent on earth. Vishnu, therefore, was the universal king, bearing on his tiara the sun and moon and stars, while Siva was the Guru, the Divine Teacher, who revealed the Absolute Truth, the reality behind the world-illusion.

The lotus was the earliest and most universal floral symbol in Indian art. It was a solar as well as a geographical or orological symbol. But in the Vāyu Purāna, which is a later one, another floral symbol is used in describing the Himalayas, the long white trumpet-shaped flower of *Datura alba* (Fig. 11), a poisonous plant sacred to Siva as the Lord of Life and Death. This flower is very generally used in South Indian architecture as a motif for bracket design, either for the cross-brackets which sustain the roofs of temple mandapams or for those supporting balconies or other architectural details.

The relief map of the Himalayas (Pl. I) will show how suggestive this floral symbol is. It seems to represent a more exact geographical knowledge than the earlier Purānas, where the lotus symbol is used. The tube of the datura flower, with its trumpet-shaped corolla, is an excellent simile for the enormously long mountain channels which carry the upper waters of the Brahmaputra and the Indus along the whole length of the Himalayas east and west of the sacred lake, until the mountain ranges take a southerly turn and discharge their waters on to the plains of India. The cross-brackets of the temple with the datura flower motif repeat the symbolism of the four-petalled World Lotus.

But the most suggestive use of the datura motif is for the gargoyles which carry off the water used in the temple service for the ritualistic bathing of the god (Pl. XI). The priest inside the shrine pours Ganges water over the head of the image. The water passes through the walls of the vimāna and is discharged by a long projecting gargoyle—a conventional datura flower—into a stone tank in the courtyard. Thus does the temple ritual symbolise the perennial flow of the sacred streams which descend from Siva's head at Kailāsa to sustain the life of his worshippers in the scorching plains below.

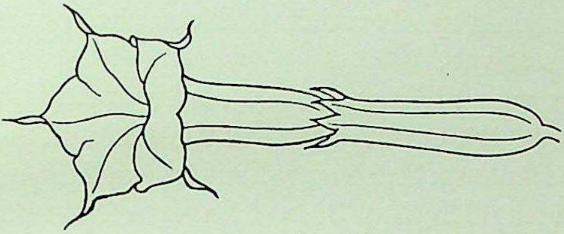
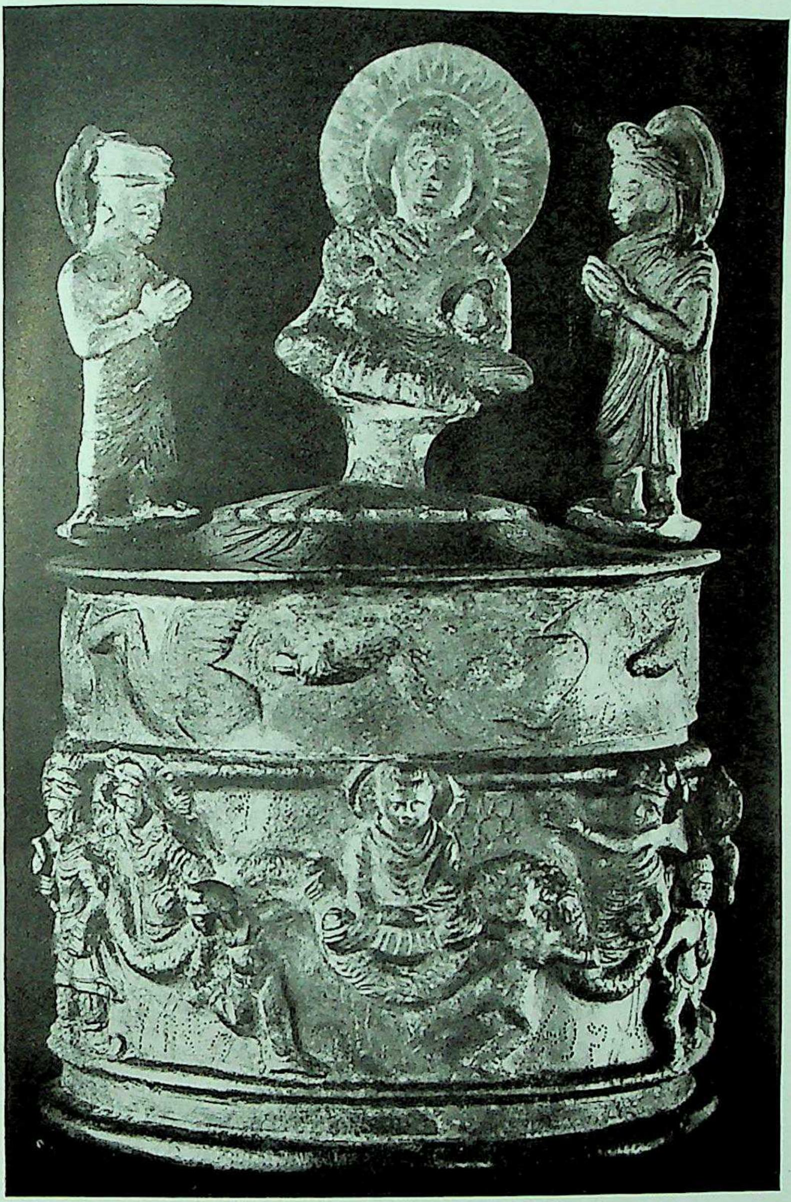


FIG. 11.—FLOWER OF *DATURA ALBA*.

The ever-changing aspects of the eternal snows are taken by Indian poets, artists, and philosophers as typical of Nature's varying moods. At dawn, when the rising sun tinges the snow-peaks with a flush of crimson light, they are the Creator's red lotus flower, the symbol of life and fertility. At noon, when the sun is overhead and they stand clear and bright enveloped by Vishnu's flower, the blue Lotus of the sky, they seem to be pillars of earth and heaven maintaining the cosmic order. At sunset they are the glorious golden Lotus, the Devas' throne. At night, when Nature herself seems wrapt in meditation, they are changed to the great white Lotus, Siva's mystic flower of purity and heavenly bliss, which opens when the moon rises over Mahādeva's brow.

The idea of spiritual purity is one most intimately associated with Himalayan symbolism. He who hopes to enter the paradise of those high Elysian fields must be pure in mind and body as the driven snow which covers them : all sins may be washed away by bathing in the sacred pool which collects the waters from Kailāsa's snows.

The earliest literary record of the great Himalayan pilgrimage, the closing scene of the Mahābhārata, tells how the Pāndava brothers, when tired of life's struggles, resigned the kingdom they had won in heroic strife and set out together with Draupadī, their common wife, to climb the Devas' citadel of snow and there rejoin their comrades who by death on the field of battle had already won their passports to heaven. But the Devas had decreed that no mortals except those who had never transgressed the law of righteousness should ever pass their portals without surrendering their bodies to Yama, the Lord of Death. And one by one they stumbled and fell, borne down by the consciousness of their faults, first Draupadī, who had shown too great partiality for Arjuna ; then Sahadeva, who in his self-conceit thought no one so wise as himself ; Nakula, who was vain of his physical beauty ; Arjuna, who had boasted of his feats of arms, and



THE BUDDHA ENTHRONED ON THE WORLD LOTUS.

(Kanishka's Relic Casket.)

Bhima, the glutton, who was careless of the wants of others. So at last the good king Yudhishthira, the eldest of the five brothers, the only one who had never swerved from the path of honour and duty, was left alone with a faithful dog which had followed them and shared all the trials of the pilgrimage. But when Indra, the King of Heaven, appeared to take him up in his shining car, a further proof was demanded of Yudhishthira—the pure precincts of the Devas' courts must never be defiled. Indra bade him leave the unclean dog behind. Yudhishthira declared that to desert a devoted friend, though only a dog, was a sin against Dharma, the inexorable law of righteousness which the Devas themselves must obey. Rather

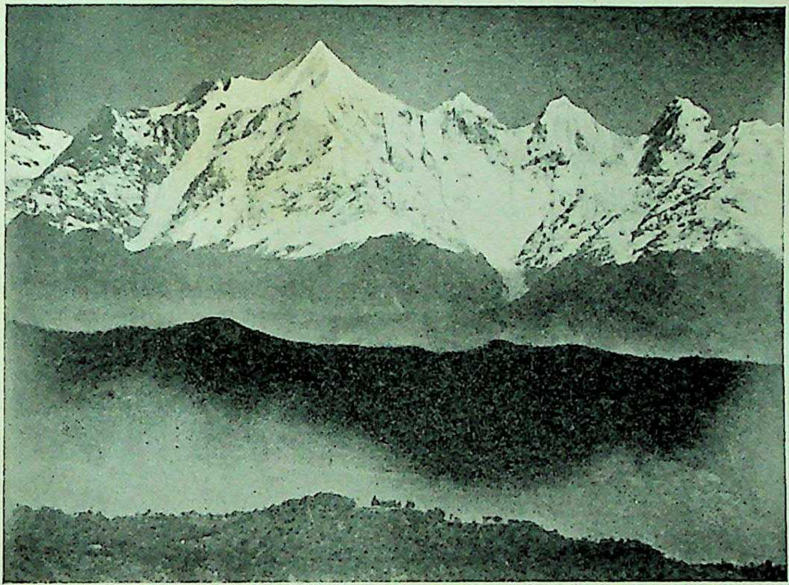


FIG. 12.—ON THE ROAD TO KAILĀSA: THE FIVE PĀNDAVA BROTHERS (HIMALAYAN SNOW-PEAKS).

than obey Indra's commands he would renounce the joys of paradise. But as he turned sorrowfully away the dog assumed its real form, that of the god Dharma himself, the pure spirit of Nature, which often thus disguises itself in humble forms to fulfil the purpose of the Lord of Life. The story reveals the tendency of Indian thought to transmute æsthetical and ethical ideas. Dharma was identified with Siva : the guardian deity of the Abode of Snow became the symbol of spiritual purity and religious duty.

CHAPTER III

THE MOUNTAIN DEIFIED

THE two previous chapters have explained how the Himalayas were used symbolically in Indian art for the World Pillar and also in the external design of two different types of temples—the so-called Dravidian temple and the temple with a curvilinear spire called by Fergusson "Indo-Aryan." We shall now follow more closely the different personifications of the mountain, and see how they are represented in Indian mythology and art.

The Indian artist and builder use these Himalayan symbols in exactly the same way as the poet. If Kalidāsa's famous poems, the Kumara-sambhava and the Meghaduta, are analysed the Himalayas appear at one moment realistically as mountains attracting the monsoon clouds and as the home of the sacred wild geese—"Earth's stately pillar girt about with cloud"—then they are pictured as filling the sky like lotus flowers; at another time they are transformed into a king, representing Vishnu, the Lord of Life, with a fair daughter who falls in love with another mountain-deity, the Hermit of Kailāsa. In Indian mythology and poetry the Himalayas are alternately the sacred shrines of Brahmā, Vishnu, and Siva. They are also Brahmā, Vishnu, and Siva in themselves.

Precisely the same imagery occurs in Indian architecture, sculpture, and painting. The logical Western mind finds it difficult to follow the varying moods of

Indian pantheistic thought, and the most eminent European scholars, failing to appreciate the strong internal evidence which Indian art and poetry provide, have spent much patient research in elaborating the thesis that the form under which the Buddha is deified was created for India by foreigners, i.e. by the craftsmen of Gandhara, and that Indian iconography must be explained as Indianised Græco-Roman art, just as the lotus pillar of the Indian order of architecture has to be explained as Indianised Persian art. In every museum of Indian art Gandharan sculptures have been given the most prominent place as evidence in support of this theory, and although more recent researches have begun to cut away a good deal of the ground upon which the theory rested, it is still so widely accepted in archæological works as probable, if not fully established, that the student of Indian art has to consider it seriously. I will, however, say at once that both on historical and artistic grounds I consider it wholly untenable.

The Gandharan was a Græco-Roman school formed by the craftsmen of the Hellenised courts of Baktrian, Parthian, Scythian, and Turki kings who ruled in Afghanistan and North-West India from about the beginning of the Christian era, and there came under the influence of the Buddhist religion. These craftsmen were familiar with the gods of the Græco-Roman pantheon, and on the conversion of their royal patrons to Buddhism they had to adapt their traditions to the new faith under the instruction of Buddhist monks. The sculptors of this Hellenistic school were realists. Their ideas of a divine image were limited to the world about them. The athletes, soldiers, and philosophers, the patricians and fair women of Greece and Rome, posed for the greater gods and goddesses of their pantheon. They carried these Hellenistic traditions into the monkish atmosphere of Gandhara. The processions and pageantry of Buddhist festivals at Taxita represented to these foreign sculptors' minds the story of the Blessed One's many lives which they carved on the exterior of stūpas and on the walls of monasteries, just as the Panathenaic festival in the Acropolis of Athens had suggested the decoration of the Parthenon to the sculptors of Greece. A Buddhist abbot practising his daily meditative exercises was the model for the Enlightened One teaching his disciples (Fig. 13), or for the divine Buddha in the Tusitā heavens. His divinity was often naively suggested by giving him the coiffure of an Apollo, which was near enough to the Buddha's bump of wisdom to satisfy monkish criticism.

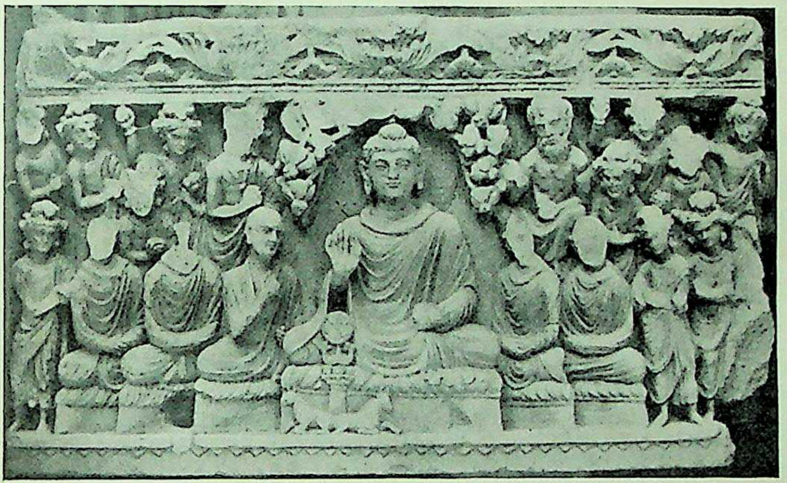


FIG. 13.—THE BUDDHA PREACHING, GANDHARA.

New generations of sculptors succeeded them, Indianised both by birth and culture, and the Buddha types of Gandharan images gradually became more and more Indian in thought and feeling. The idolatry which Gandharan kings had countenanced, though it was opposed to the teaching of primitive Buddhism, was taken up by Indian royal courts and monasteries as the influence of Mahayāna doctrines grew stronger. So at last we come to a type of image fixed by long tradition as the divine ideal of India (Pl. XIII) and of the greater part of Asia, an ideal accepted by all sects—Buddhist, Jain, and Brahmanical.

It is that of the Great Yogi " abiding alone," as the Bhagavad Gītā says,

> " in a secret place without craving and without possessions, upon a firm seat with the working of the mind and senses held in check, with body, head, and neck in perfect equipoise, meditating so that he may reach the boundless Abyss, who knows intuitively the infinite joy that lies beyond the senses and becomes like a lamp in a windless place that flickereth not."

Let us first remember that in all Indian art practice, we may say in all Asiatic art, a clear and definite mental image, such as this which the Bhagavad Gītā evokes, always precedes the realisation of the idea in material form with the sculptor's chisel or painter's brush. An immemorial tradition has provided the Indian sculptor and painter with an elaborate ritual designed to assist the artist in evoking the exact mental image appropriate for any particular subject. The ritual of a Buddhist image maker is thus given in an ancient text translated by Professor Foucher[1]:

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[1] *Iconographie boudhique.*

Having first purified his body by ablutions and put on clean garments, he repairs to a solitary spot appropriate for the thought he has in his mind. If the benign powers of Nature are to be invoked he chooses the forest shade or the banks of a holy river, if the tāmasic, or the powers of involution, a place of dread, such as a cremation ground or cemetery. Then seating himself on a purified spot, he invokes the hosts of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas into the space in front of him and offers them flowers and perfumes, real or imaginary.

He next commences to recite the "Sevenfold Office," a ritual of spiritual purification. First the confession of his sins, which might be unconscionably long for many modern devotees of art. Next an expression of joyous sympathy with the merits of others—there were not so many antagonistic schools of art in those days as there are now. Then he must declare his belief in the Three Jewels of the Buddhist faith—Buddha, the Doctrine, and the Community—resolve to persevere in the Good Way; pray to all the Blessed Ones that they should continue to preach the doctrine and consent for the world's good to forgo for a time the right they had earned to enter Nirvāna. Finally he must dedicate all the merit he himself might earn to the universal welfare of humanity.

Then follows a series of meditative exercises. He must realise by thought the four infinite qualities, or perfect states, which are: love for all, compassion for the miserable, joy in the happiness of others, and even-mindedness. Lastly there are two meditations on the first principles of all things, and as a corollary on their emptiness or absolute non-existence. "By the fire of the idea of emptiness," says the text, "the five elements of individual consciousness are destroyed beyond recovery." The identity of the yogin or image-maker being thus merged with that of the divinity invoked, he has but to utter the appropriate mystic syllable which contains what is called the "germ" of the divinity, to make the proper gesture, or mudrā, and to recite the correct mantras, when the apparition of the god or goddess presents itself to his mental vision "like a reflection in a mirror or as in a dream."

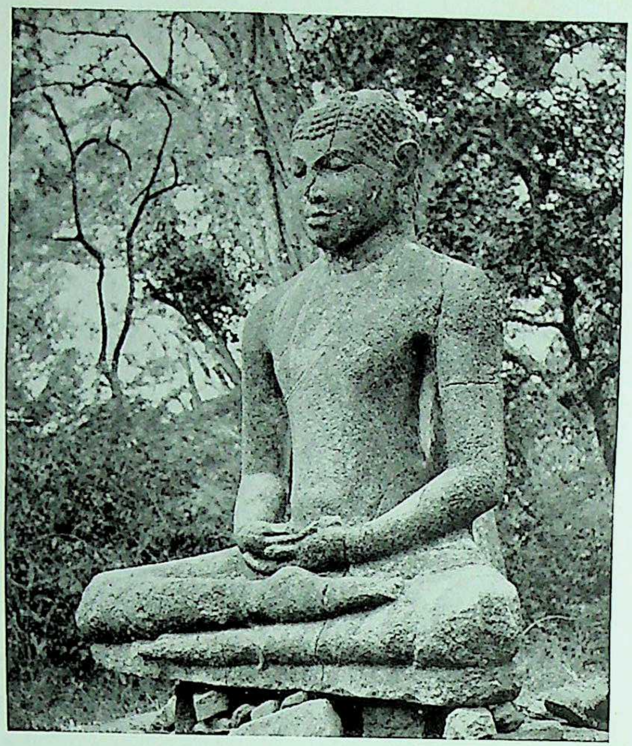
The ritual does not therefore imply that the artist, like the modern academician, calls forth some vague and shadowy image out of his inner consciousness and gradually moulds and remoulds it into shape with his hands as the idea becomes more fixed and definite. The image comes out of the soul of Nature, created for him by Brahmā the All-Creator; but the artist, the worshipper, must see it clearly in his mind's eye, realise it and make it a part of his own being, before he attempts to give it material form. When the mental image is perfect the plastic or pictorial likeness of it follows swiftly and surely, without faltering or experiment. The Eastern artist has a traditional and philosophical conception of Nature which makes his art a religious exercise and a process of self-realisation determined by fixed laws and conventions not subject to the vagaries of individual experiment.

There is, however, this in common between the two schools, Eastern and Western, that as nothing is created out of nothing, there must be some objective foundation upon which the subjective artistic ideal is built, whatever may be the method of building. The question we are now considering is what objective foundation is there for the sublime mental image which finds expression in Indian sculpture and painting, one which all India and nearly all Asia has accepted as the Divine ideal ? Obviously it is the figure of a Yogi, the Yogi described in the noble words of the Bhagavad Gītā. But as the ideal is the same in Buddhist, Jain, and Brahmanical art, there must have been one Supreme Yogi which the first artist conceiving this image had in his mind, and all India at one time or other must have been thinking like the artist, otherwise the same mental image could not have persisted for generation after generation, and century after century, attracting the adoration of so many millions of worshippers of different creeds.

If we accept the scientific theory of Indian artistic origins this Supreme Yogi was no other than the abbot of some Gandharan monastery, or a succession of abbots, who sat for their portraits to several generations of Græco-Roman craftsmen about the beginning of the Christian era. Surely a very lame and impotent conclusion ; for what spiritual or intellectual quality is there in any Gandharan image ever discovered which could have so impressed the mind of India that all sects should have united in regarding it as the highest ideal of divinity attainable by human thought ? It cannot even be maintained that the first Indian sculptures and paintings of the Yogi type were made in Gandhara, for the practice of Yoga began centuries before the Christian era. Recent research points to the conclusion that the use of cult images by Brahmanical schools in India as aids to devotion goes back even to Vedic times. But since no Buddhist or other divine image of a pre-Gandharan age has yet been discovered, it is possible to argue that the Gandharan images were considered so much finer than any of Indian make that they were universally adopted by Indian sculptors and painters as models to be imitated.

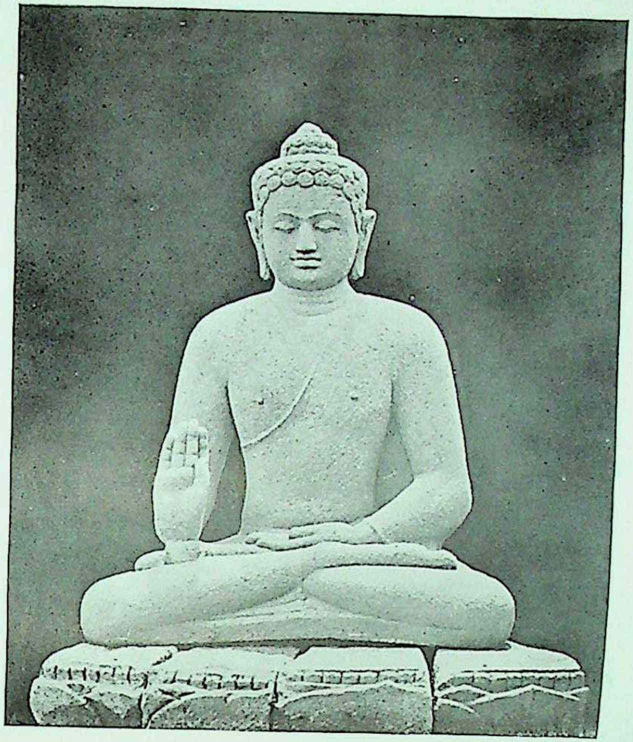
Was there then before this time no Indian ideal of the Divine Yogi, no mental image like that of the Bhagavad Gītā, which every Indian conjured up in his devotional exercises day by day, until it became a dynamic symbol for the whole art of Asia? And if there was one, as surely there must have been, does it follow that it must have been a vision of the Blessed One sitting under the Bodhi tree at Gayā, whom all Buddhists worshipped? No, for even that could never have made an appeal so universal. It would never have appealed to Brahmans or Jains as it did to followers of the Buddha. This mental image must have been of an archetype which summed up all Indian ideals—of the Great Hero of the Jains; of the Enlightened One of the Buddhists; of Siva, Vishnu, Krishna, and of Brahmā. There is only one place in India, Kailāsa in the Himalayas, the sacred spot where, as the Mahābhārata declares, Vyāsa taught the Vedas to his disciples, in which such a universal symbol has existed for untold ages—a snow-crowned symbol shining like a beacon on the roof of the world, blue-necked like a lamp in a windless place, one which all India has worshipped from the dawn of her history. It is one which constantly evokes in her mind the image of the Divine Thinker controlling the universe, seated on a firm seat in His Himalayan cell, the secret place He has chosen at the centre of the

PLATE XIIIA



THE BUDDHA AS THE DIVINE YOGI
(ANURADHAPURA).

PLATE XIIIB



THE BUDDHA AS THE DIVINE YOGI
(BOROBUDUR).

World Lotus where only the spiritual eye can see Him

> ' Calm as a full cloud resting on a hill,
> A waveless lake when every breeze is still,
> Like a torch burning in a sheltered spot,
> So still was He, unmoving, breathing not." [1]

He appears there to all His devotees who have dared the steep ascent in the form in which they have been accustomed to worship Him ; to the Buddhist pilgrim as the Lord Buddha, to the Jain as the first of the Tirthtankaras, to the Saiva as Mahādeva, to the Vaishnava as Vāsudeva, to the Christian as the Saviour of the world.

And where could one find a more awe-inspiring symbol for the intense creative energy of concentrated thought vibrating through all space than in this solemn spot where the titanic Himalayan masses seem to culminate and form the centre from which all the great rivers of Asia radiate fertility to the plains below ? At least, to the ancient seers who laid the philosophic foundations of Indian religion this seemed to be the appointed place for the Creator's earthly throne. The vision of the Great Thinker ruling the world from the heights of Kailāsa is the Divine ideal which has inspired the whole art of Asia.

Even now Kailāsa is the lode-stone which draws pilgrims of all creeds from the farthest corners of the continent. The Vedic thought which created Indian philosophy and religion runs like a golden thread through all Indian art, and when one strips off all the local, academic, sectarian, or racial trappings of the different Yogī images—Gandharan, Chinese, Japanese, Burmese, Jain, Buddhist, Saiva, and Vaishnava—they all merge finally into the archetype of the Divine Thinker of the Himalayas controlling the universe, the mental image which primeval tradition has fixed in the Indian mind, though it was only dimly apprehended by the sculptors of Gandhara.

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[1] "Kalidāsa, Kumara-sambhava," Griffith's trans.

The mistake which so many archæologists have made is to take these outward trappings and technical accessories of the craftsman as a revelation of the inner informing spirit of Indian art. The sectarian classification which European scholars have used to distinguish the different phases of Hindu art also tends to misleading interpretations of its intentions and ideals. Even such a brilliant exponent of scientific archæology as Professor Foucher has overlooked very striking evidence of the penetration of Indian thought into the art of Gandhara. The Gandharan craftsman himself at a very early time, if not from the beginning of Gandharan art, identified the divine Buddha with the Great Thinker of Kailāsa. The proof of this is the famous relic casket of Kanishka discovered near Peshawar in 1909 (Pl. XII). Here the Buddha is made to take the traditional place assigned to Brahmā the Creator, on the centre of the World Lotus.

On the lid of the casket the image of Buddha, worshipped by Kanishka himself, is placed on Brahmā's throne, as described in the Vishnu Purāna, " like the seed-vessel of the lotus." The expanded petals of the flower cover the lid. The holy lake is suggested by a frieze of Brahmā's sacred birds, the wild-geese (*hamsas*), whose Himalayan home is Mānasarovara. They recall the passage in the Meghaduta in which the banished Yaksha, addressing the monsoon cloud as it sweeps by on its way to the Himalayas, says : " The wild geese hearing thy thunder so pleasant to the ear, which bringeth up the mushrooms from the fertile earth, prepare to fly to Mānasarovara, . . . they will be thy companions in the sky to Kailāsa."

The serpentine scroll on the lower part of the casket probably represents the mythical serpent, Sesha or Ananta—the Milky Way—which supports the earth on its head and encircles it with its coils. The whole design of the casket is a Hellenised adaptation of the same Indian idea which formed the motif of Asoka's pillars, only the seed-vessel in this case is the conical fruit of the pink or rose lotus, Brahmā's flower, instead of the melon-shaped fruit of the blue water-lily, the symbol of Vishnu and of the universal pillar. It is quite clear that the Gandharan craftsman of the first century A.D. in creating this Buddhist image was trying to realise an Indian and not a Greek idea. However dim the mental image may have been, he had a vision of the Buddha's ideal archetype, the Divine Thinker of Kailāsa.

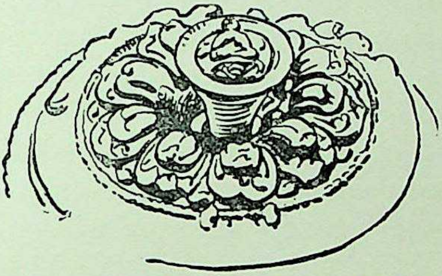

FIG. 14.—THE BUDDHA ENTHRONED ON THE WORLD LOTUS (NEPALESE CASKET).

The same idea is embedded in the still living tradition of Nepalese and Tibetan art. Fig. 14 gives a sketch of the top of a repoussé brass vessel, formerly in my possession, used by a Lama to carry his household gods and ritualistic implements. The decoration of the vessel is a variation of the design of Kanishka's casket. Forming the centre of the circular lid and serving as a handle for it is the seed-vessel of Brahmā's lotus flower upon which a Buddha or Bodhisattva is enthroned. The lid itself is splendidly decorated with several rows of petals of the World Lotus in high relief, the rows being separated by narrower bands upon which the signs of the zodiac and various Buddhist symbols are represented. Though in point of age at least fifteen hundred years divide these two sacred vessels, there is no doubt that the same motif served for the design of both of them.

It is not my purpose to enter into all the elaborate symbolism which grew out of the original dynamic ideas, when the necessity of popularising the esoteric teaching of Indian religion was felt. Those who care to follow up the subject will find enough material in the rapidly increasing literature of Indian iconography. Though a knowledge of it is essential for understanding the didactic side of Indian symbolism, it is much more important for the art student to realise the fundamental æsthetic ideas upon which this symbolism was based.

Before leaving the subject of Gandharan sculpture it is necessary to consider another type of image, the standing figure of Buddha as the Teacher. Here archæological research has been more successful in tracing the Hellenic prototype than it has been in the other Yogi image. It is clear, as Professor Foucher has pointed out,[1] that the first Gandharan sculptors sometimes used for this figure the traditional pose of the Greek dramatist, Sophocles. But though the starting point seems to have been Hellenic, the original Gandharan type was soon transformed and adapted to Indian ideals. Indian art kept some of the external trappings, the drapery and technique of the Gandharan craftsmen, but breathed the divine spirit into a commonplace realistic conception. Just as in the Yogi type of Buddha the Gandharan model was transfigured and inspired by the idealism of India's Himalayan āshramas.

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[1] *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art.*

There were, as we have seen already, two distinct thought images inspiring the symbolism of Indian art. One represented the Himalayas as the seat of the creative power, the other as the static force which kept an equilibrium between the two opposites—creation and destruction. The first image was that of the Great Yogi, the second was that of Vishnu, the all-pervading Spirit of Life, upholding the heavens with his body and making it the central pillar of the universe, a singularly appropriate metaphor for the towering Himalayan snow-peaks seen from the plains of India. A fine bas-relief at Māmallapuram,[1] representing Vishnu as an eight-armed sun-god, gives expression to this latter idea. With one arm he upholds the heavens, with the others he wields his symbolic weapons, the bow and arrow, sword, discus, mace, and his shield and conch-shell trumpet. He acts as the regulating or static power which preserves the balance between Brahmā the Creator and Siva the Destroyer; the former personifies the sun which is ascending on Vishnu's right hand and the latter the sun descending on the left. Vishnu partly covers the sun's disc with his shield and touches Siva's image with one finger and one toe, an allusion to the three strides with which the sun-god is said to complete his daily round. The Vishnu image from Mathura (Pl. XIVA), with body equipoised, both feet firmly planted and arms held closely to both sides, expresses even more clearly the idea of the mystic pillar which sustains the universe.

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[1] See *Handbook of Indian Art*, by the author, Pl. LX.

Now, if we turn to the Buddhist images of the Mathura school (Pl. XIVB) and compare them with the older Gandharan models,[1] we shall see that, though the Indian sculptors have accepted as inevitable certain conventions of dress and pose, the Buddhist image has obtained a much closer affinity with the Indian ideal of Vishnu's mystic body, the pillar of the universe, and no longer suggests any relation with the portrait statue of a Greek celebrity. And all the æsthetic faults which made divinity sit so awkwardly upon Gandharan images, the squat figure and slouching pose, the dowdy and ill-hung drapery, have been removed by a master-craftsman's touch. The symmetrically balanced pose, both of body and of limbs, emphasised by the rhythmic sweep of line so characteristic of the contemporary Ajantā school of painting, and by the treatment of the diaphanous robe through which the slim transcendental body purified by Yoga is revealed, show that the Mathura school in Gupta times had shaken itself entirely free from the trammels of Gandhara. This Buddha type belongs body and soul to Indian art. The Great Teacher expounding the Dharma, the moral law by which mankind can obtain release from sufferings, has become the mystic

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[1] See Fig. 15A.

Pillar which maintains the balance of the universe. The Buddha is admitted into the Hindu pantheon as one of the Avatars of Vishnu. A proof that the Hindu sculptor identified Buddha with Vishnu, just as the Buddhist craftsman of Gandhara identified him with Brahmā, is given by a bas-relief at Māmallapuram (Fig. 15B), where Vishnu appears in the traditional pose of the Gandharan standing Buddha (Fig. 15A). But the ideal which inspired the sculptor's chisel was that of the mystic Himalayan Pillar, not the hybrid art of Gandhara.

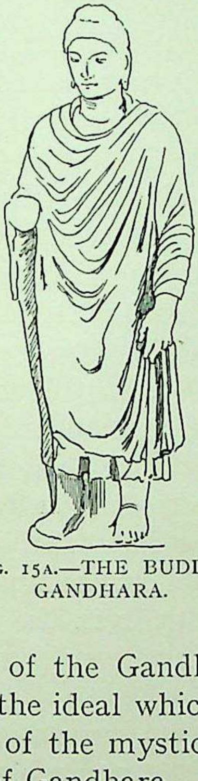


Fig. 15A.—THE BUDDHA, GANDHARA.

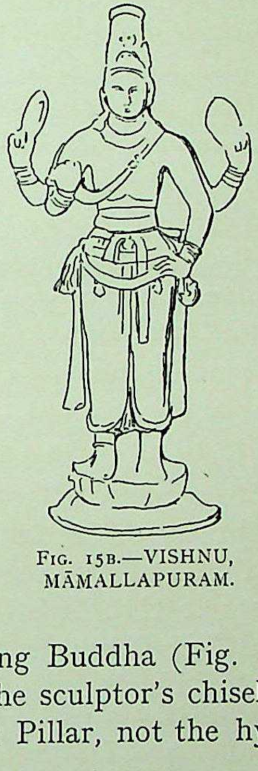
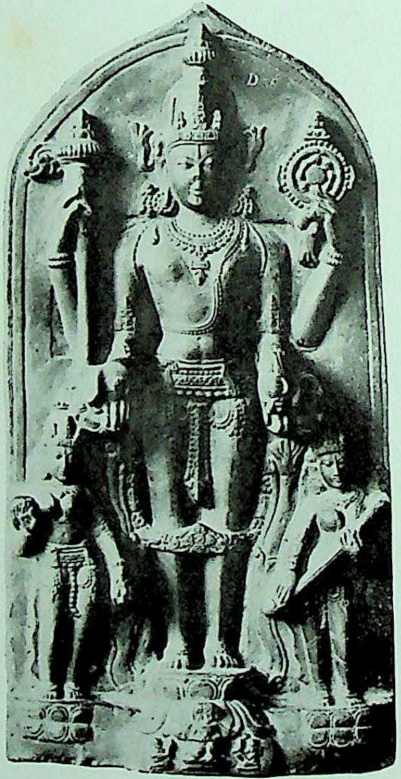


Fig. 15B.—VISHNU, MĀMALLAPURAM.

It does not vitiate my argument that Hindu sculptures which illustrate the concept of the Universal Pillar may be later in date than the Gandharan figure. The apparent anachronism need not trouble the reader if it is realised that the two concepts of the Divine Thinker and the Universal Pillar did not originate from any particular school of sculpture or painting. They were fundamental ideas, common to all religions, and older even than Buddhism, which came from the impressions made on Indian imagination by the wonders of the greatest of all *tirthas* where devotees of all sects met at the heart of the World Lotus. Professor Foucher in his admirable monograph on the beginnings of Buddhist art, traces back the first conceptions of the image makers to the terra-cotta and metal souvenirs brought back by pilgrims to the four great *tirthas*, to Kapilavastu, where the Blessed One was born, to Buddh-Gayā, where he obtained Nirvāna, to Sarnāth, where he began to turn the Wheel of the Law, and to Kuçināgara, where his Parinirvāna was accomplished. But Indian art is older than Buddhism. The four great pilgrimages of Buddhist devotees did not obliterate the mental images of a far older and holier *tirtha*, which though not connected with the life of the historical Buddha was associated with many older teachers and was never superseded in Indian thought as the sacred city of the immortal gods. When the Buddha himself was deified he was translated at once to that high throne of the gods in the heart of the Himalayas, as we can see in the golden relic casket of Kanishka's stūpa.

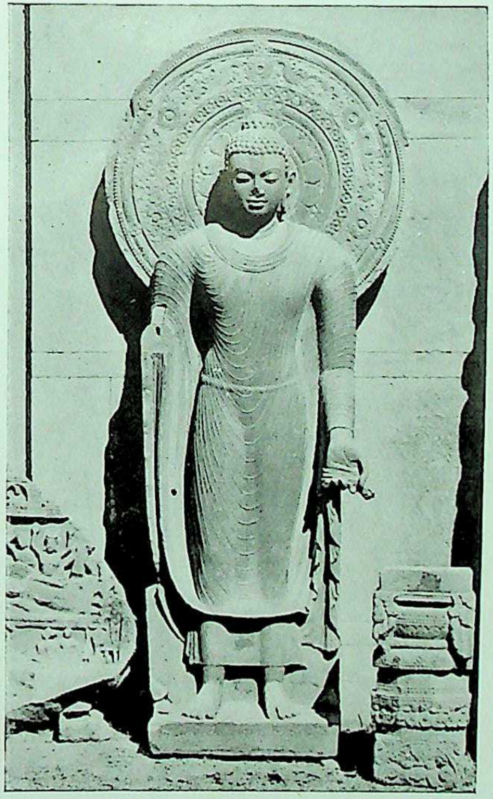
Archæological research has not yet penetrated to this central inspirational source of Indian art, but it is not necessary to wait for explorations at Kailāsa to discover the profound impressions which the mystery and sublimity of the Himalayas made upon Indian imagination. These impressions are already clearly

PLATE XIVA

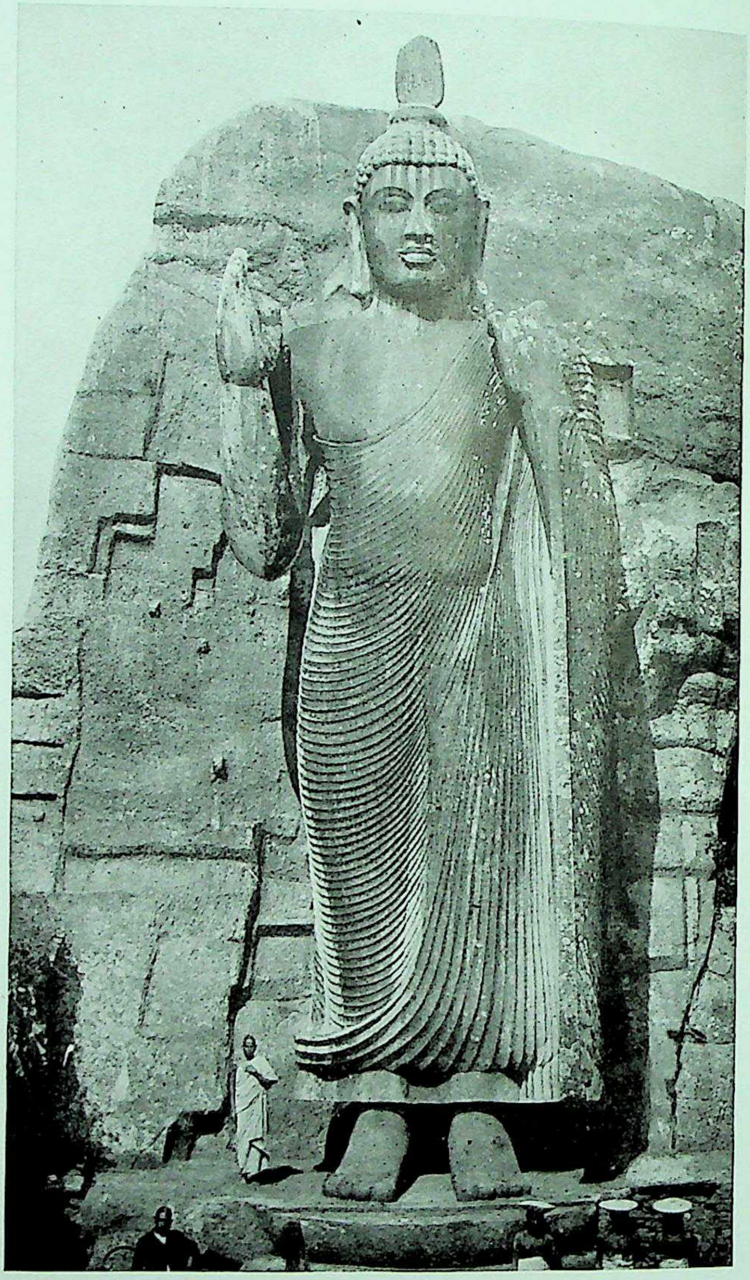


VISHNU AS THE UNIVERSAL PILLAR
(MATHURĀ).

PLATE XIVB



THE BUDDHA AS THE UNIVERSAL PILLAR
(MATHURĀ).



THE BUDDHA AS THE UNIVERSAL PILLAR
(AKWANA, CEYLON).

indicated in the discoveries already made, and in the still living traditions of Indian art.

The Silpa-Sāstras, the canonical books of the Indian craftsmen, in which the symbolism of art is systematised in accordance with the philosophic teaching of the Upanishads, classify temple images after the three *gunas*, the three qualities or conditions of matter—rajas, sattvam, and tamas, representing the three cosmic forces, evolution, equilibrium, and involution. Brahmā, the Creator, is the archetype of rājasic images, or those representing the conditions of evolution; Vishnu is the archetype of sāttvic images, while Siva in his tāmasic aspect represents the destructive energy of matter. We have already seen how Indian artistic imagination seized upon the Himalayas as the primeval and universal symbols of the rājasic and sāttvic properties of Nature. In the next chapter we shall discuss the third category, tāmasic images, and a different natural environment which helped to form the mental images of the Indian mystic, through which these philosophic concepts materialised in temple sculpture and painting.

CHAPTER IV

THE SACRED DANCE

THE Himalayan environment in which Vedic thought developed furnished, as we have seen, two iconic symbols for the gunas—that of the Great Yogi, who stood for the creative power of thought, and that of Vishnu, the Maintainer, or the Universal Pillar. The third guna, the destructive or tāmasic energy of Nature, was represented in Vedic mythology by Rudra, the Roarer, a god of storms, earthquakes, and forest fires, to whom some of the Vedic hymns are addressed. Rudra, however, was gradually absorbed into the philosophic synthesis of the Saiva cult and is represented in Indian art by the Bhaīrava, or terrible aspect of Siva, the subject of one of the most magnificent of the sculptures of Elephanta (Fig. 16). It was, however, in the Deccan and in Southern India—in a far different environment to that of its original Himalayan home—that the Saiva cult developed its philosophic system and its iconic symbolism. We have now to consider what influence this change of scene may have had upon Indian religious art.

There are of course certain aspects of Nature which vary comparatively little with change of place, and the philosophic Brahman, who in his daily sādhana, at the three appointed times, sought a universal symbol to fix his mind on the three qualities of Nature, found one in the sun at its rising, zenith, and going down, which represented to him the Trimūrti, the

Three Aspects of the One, a symbol magnificently realised in the great sculpture of Elephanta. Thus Brahmā, the Rājasic Aspect, was associated with the rising sun; Vishnu, the Sāttvic Aspect, with the sun at its zenith; Siva, the Tāmasic Aspect, with sunset. But Brahmanical teachers also drew many of the symbols which they used to explain their esoteric doctrines from their local environment, often borrowing and adapting those of non-Aryan cults which came under their influence. So, comparatively late in the development of Indian iconic symbolism, we find in the temple worship of the Saivas in Southern India

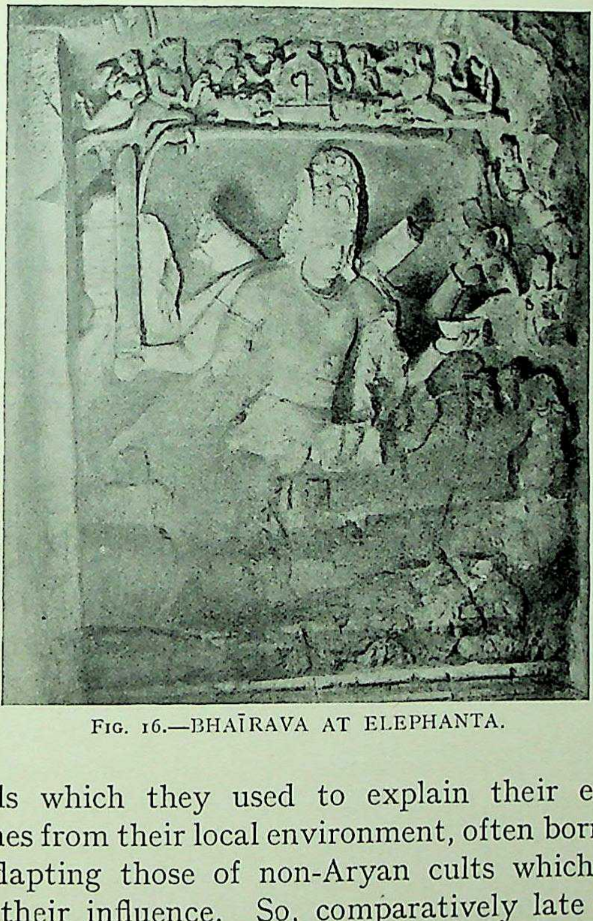


FIG. 16.—BHAĪRAVA AT ELEPHANTA.

a new type of image representing Siva as Nātārājā, or the Lord of the Dance of Destruction, a wonderful conception now generally recognised as one of India's greatest contributions to the world's art.

The date of the earliest known stone sculptures of this type, somewhere about the sixth century A.D., gives no idea as to when the Nātārājā image was first conceived. The stone image may have been derived from wooden prototypes of much earlier date. And long before wooden or other icons were made the mental images may have been symbolised in the sacred dance of Vedic ritual.

Nor does the geographical distribution of Nātārājā worship prove that it originated in Southern India. Dancing has been a part of religious ritual all the world over. I myself once saw a living embodiment of the Nātārājā on a lonely Himalayan hill-top. A local Rājā, who after taking off his everyday dress and putting on a clean white tunic, apparently made for the occasion, ended his evening *pūja* by dancing the symbolic dance in face of the setting sun. So it is quite possible that the Saivas, who were the staunchest exponents of the ideals of the Vedic āshramas of the north, carried into Southern India the sacred dance of Vedic ritual, together with their impressions of Siva's mystic Himalayan shrine, and embodied it in the image of the Nātārājā.

But there is, perhaps, a particular reason why, of the three dynamic symbols which Vedic philosophy gave to Indian art, that of the Nātārājā became specially consecrated to the art of the south, while the other two were more distinctive of northern art. The Brahman in Southern India found himself in a new environment, very different to that of the Himalayas, where the Vedic religion had its early home. The sacred rivers which descend from Siva's brow had indeed their counterparts in the great rivers of the Deccan—the Krishnā and Godāvarī, with their tributaries named after the heroes of the Mahābhārata. But the pilgrims who worshipped the creative powers at their sources in the Western Ghāts had no vision of Siva's icy cell where the Great Yogi sat in meditation, nor of those snow-capped pinnacles which seemed to reach to the highest heavens and hold the universe in balance in their summits. As they clambered up and down the mighty steps which Nature has built up along the western coast (Fig. 17) they could watch the sun in its daily stride across the Deccan plateau, from the time when the Dragon of the Eastern

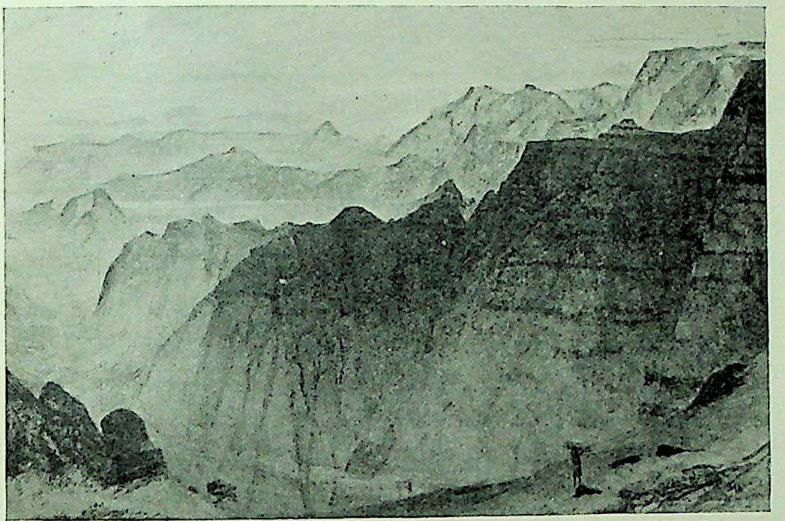


FIG. 17.—THE WESTERN GHATS FROM MAHABLESHWAR.

(From a Water-colour by George Landseer, Victoria and Albert Museum.)

Seas released it from its maw at dawn, until it was swallowed up at eventide by the Dragon of the West. This was a familiar symbol of the cosmic process of life, death, and rebirth used as a motif in the Amarāvatī sculptures, often as a long scroll of lotus flowers issuing at the end from the open jaw of a makara, a sea-dragon, and being swallowed at the opposite end by a similar monster. The dragons are also frequently placed on opposite sides at the springing of the arch used for windows and gables of monasteries and stūpa houses and for the *torana*, or arch of flame, used as an aura for an image.

But of all the impressions which the pilgrims to the sacred shrines along the Western Ghats carried home with them, the most vivid must have been the gorgeous spectacle of the sun in its descent towards the ocean, illuminating tier after tier of rocky precipices (Fig. 17) and forest-clad ravines with its slanting rays of crimson and burnished gold, until at the time of evening prayer (*sandhya*) it touched the far-off sea horizon and began the Sacred Dance in response to the ceaseless time-beat of the waves—the Dance of the Cosmic Rhythm which all the Rishis and all the Devas knew.

In fair weather it was only a gentle swaying movement, like the fluttering of falling leaves in the forest on a still autumn evening, for Siva then only manifested his benignant aspect. But when the setting sun flashed fierce red rays through banks of purple cloud and Siva's mighty drum began its thunderous beat along the shore, while the long snake-like rollers showed their glittering teeth, then the Great God revealed himself in his tremendous world-shaking

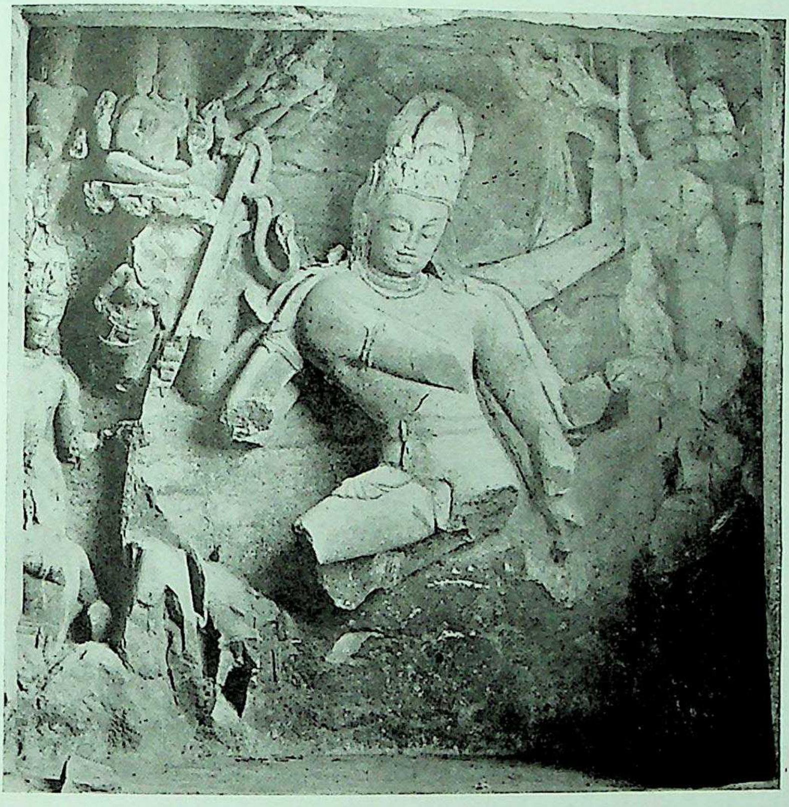
Dance, the Tandavan, which summed up the threefold processes of Nature, creation, preservation, and destruction, and woe betide the unhappy mariner who was whirled within the ambit of that awful Dance! The corpses strewn along the shore next day increased the unrelenting toll which the Lord of Death demands always from his worshippers.

Such was the constant mental stimulus which the Brahman at his evening meditation on the Western Ghats received from the wonderful nature he saw around him; until the Sacred Dance of the Vedic ritual with which he responded to the prompting of his spiritual self became interwoven with his philosophy and took a permanent place among the temple icons of the Deccan and Southern India, the natural imagery being translated into metaphysical concepts, for the Brahman, like the Platonic philosopher, used the beauties of earth as steps by which he climbed upwards to the higher planes of thought.

There was, of course, a mythological interpretation of the Dance, like those which in other religions explain the natural phenomena serving as the basis of metaphysical speculations. The myth connected with the Nātārājā has a good deal of primitive magic mixed up with it. It recalls also the philosophical disputations, sometimes of a very violent character, in which the followers of different sects strove to maintain the superiority of their respective doctrines. Siva for his devotees is the supreme philosopher and the master magician. Once upon a time, it is said, Siva disguised as a yogi came to a forest hermitage to argue with certain Rishis who held heretical doctrines. He easily defeated them in argument, and they in a rage tried to destroy him by black magic, first by creating a fierce tiger in the sacrificial fire. Siva seized it in its spring, stripped off its skin with the nail of his little finger and wrapped it as a garment round his loins. Then they created a venomous serpent which Siva took and wreathed as a garland round his neck and began to dance. Next an evil spirit shaped like an ugly dwarf rushed out of the fire. But Siva crushed it under his foot, broke its back and then resumed his triumphant Dance, the Dance of the Cosmic Rhythm, with all the Devas and all the Rishis as witnesses. The Tandavan is the subject of one of the high-relief sculptures of the great temple at Elephanta (Pl. XVI), probably by the same unknown master who carved the wonderful colossal bust of the Trimūrti around which the whole series is grouped. The Nātārājā of Elephanta stands out as one of the supreme achievements of the classic age of Indian art. A replica of it, much inferior in style but less mutilated, is found at Ellora.

Of the metal images of the Nātārājā the best known and best preserved are those of copper or bronze used in the processional service of the great temples of Southern India. We shall notice first the solar symbolism in the arch of radiance (torana) or aura of flame surrounding the image (Pl. XVIIA). Sometimes there is a makara, or crocodile dragon, disgorging and swallowing it on either side, according to the ancient myth of sunrise and sunset. The association of Siva with his Himalayan hermitage is indicated by the wavy locks, spread out like a halo round his head in the whirling of the dance, among which a miniature image of Ganga reminds the worshipper of Kailāsa

PLATE XVI



SIVA DANCING THE TANDAVAN (ELEPHANTA).

and its sacred streams; the third eye in the forehead represents spiritual insight, and every gesture (mūdra) has its special significance.

The upper right hand is rattling an hour-glass drum to beat the rhythm of the dance—sound representing the primary creative force and the intervals of the beat the time-process. The corresponding arm on the left holds a flame, the fire of sacrifice. The other left hand is stretched across the body and points to the upraised foot, a gesture signifying the blissful refuge which Siva grants to those who seek his grace. The upraised hand of the lower right arm with a cobra coiled round it also gives an assurance of protection to the devotee.

The dance has a dual significance. On the one hand it represents the material processes of nature, on the other the subjective spiritual processes by which worldly passions, evil-thinking, and wickedness are destroyed or transmuted in the alembic of the Divine Alchemist.

Every Indian image has its appropriate *dhyāna*, a devotional test, generally in Sanskrit, used as a guide by the imager, conveying the impression which the icon is intended to make in the mind of the worshipper. This is one which is still used in the temple service of Southern India:

> " O Lord of the Dance, who calls by beat of drum all those who are absorbed in worldly things, and dispels the fear of the humble and comforts them with His love divine: who points with His uplifted Lotus foot as the refuge of Salvation; who carries the fire of sacrifice and dances in the Hall of the Universe, do Thou protect us! "[1]

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[1] O. C. Gangoly, *South Indian Bronzes.*

Another one from a Tamil text [1] runs thus in translation :

> " O my Lord, Thy hand holding the sacred drum hath made and ordered the heavens and earth and other worlds and souls innumerable. Thy uplifted hand protects the multifarious animate and inanimate extended universe. Thy sacred foot, planted on the ground, gives an abode to the tired soul struggling in the toils of Karma. It is Thy uplifted foot that grants eternal bliss to those that approach Thee. These Five Actions are indeed Thy handiwork."

The Five Actions are those of creation, preservation, destruction, illusion or incarnation, and release or salvation.

All Indian images conform to canonical rules of design and proportion fixed by immemorial tradition in the scriptures of craft-ritual (silpa-sāstras), and are never regarded from the point of view of the modern critic as pure works of art. The supreme artistic qualities which the finest of them undoubtedly possess are a subconscious reflection of the spiritual efforts of mystics who worshipped the divinity in Nature, rather than the result of a deliberate attempt to please the eye. The imagers only aimed at spiritual truth, being sure that in finding it they would realise all perfections.

But it would be a great mistake to conclude, because they conformed to a traditional artistic canon, accepted as an expression of the highest spiritual ideals by generation after generation, that all Indian images are approximately equal in merit as works of

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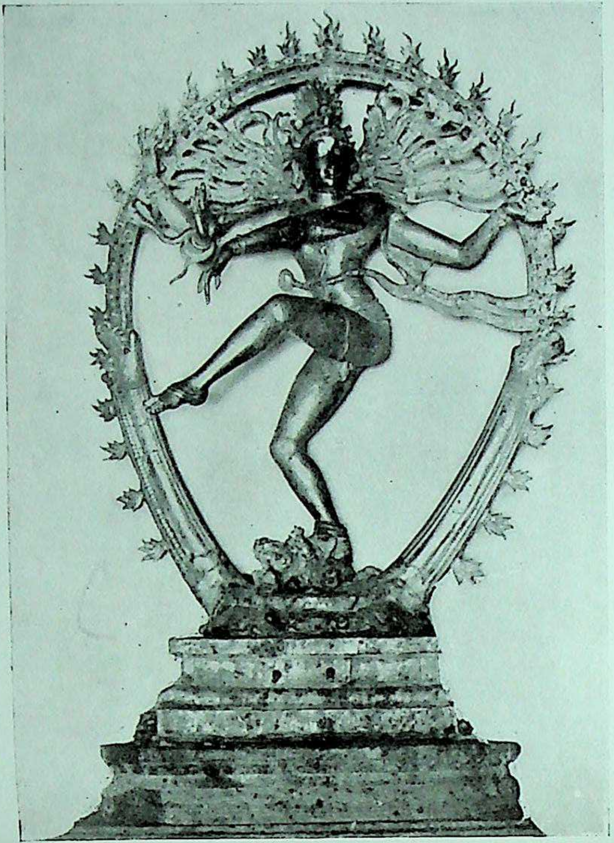
[1] A. Coomaraswamy, *Catalogue of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts*, Indian section.

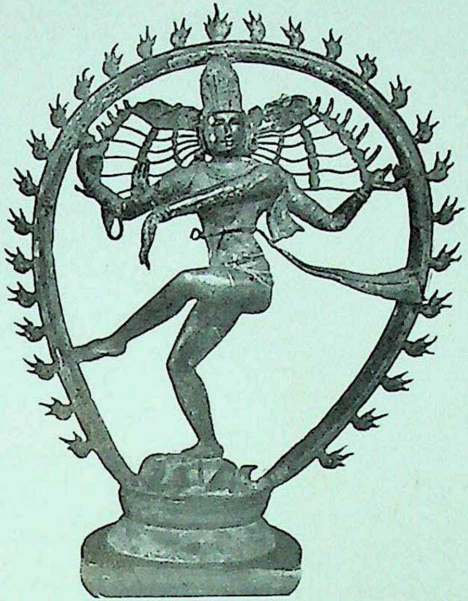
Plate XVIIa



SIVA AS NĀTĀRĀJA.

(*Tanjore Temple.*)

Plate XVIIb



SIVA AS NĀTĀRĀJA.

(*Madras Museum.*)

art. The highest art is as rare in India as it is anywhere else, and indeed more so, for in very few countries have the destructive energies of the iconoclast been so violent and so persistent as they have been in India. There is often as much difference in artistry between two Nāṭārājā images, approximately the same in design, proportion, and symbolism, as there is between the masterpieces of Gothic sculpture in the Middle Ages and the modern mason's mechanical commercial reproductions.

It is necessary to bear this in mind, because there is at the present time a very excusable reaction against the indiscriminate abuse formerly poured upon Indian art, which shows itself in an equally indiscriminate adulation, especially for Indian antiques or things which pass for antiques. Things which twenty years ago were regarded as artistically worthless are now placed among the choicest treasures of the collector's cabinet. But mediocre or decadent art should be recognised as such, whether it be Eastern or Western. It cannot be raised to a higher plane by copious libations of exuberant verbiage, though this kind of excess may be less harmful to Indian art than the former indifference and condemnation.

The superb artistry of the two well-known images of the Madras Museum (Pl. XVII and XVIII), dating from about the tenth or eleventh century, has won the unqualified admiration of the famous French sculptor, Auguste Rodin,[1] whose sympathy for the religious art of India was attracted by its close affinity with the spirit of the great Gothic cathedrals. But these two stand almost alone among the metal images of the

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[1] *Ars Asiatica*, Part III, edited by Victor Goloubefl.

Nātārājā now known to exist, for though there are not a few examples in other collections, public and private, none are of quite the same rank as art, excepting the splendid one (Pl. XVIIA) which still occupies its original place in the great temple of Tanjore built in the eleventh century by the Chola Rājārājā the Great. This is in a more perfect condition than either of the Madras Museum images and is further distinguished as being of very unusual size, the figure, excluding the pedestal and the aura, being nearly 4 feet high.

There may of course be many others of equal merit still buried underground or hidden away in other South Indian temples, and there is plenty of sculpture of different kinds still extant to testify that India, like other countries, had its golden age, when the magic wand of art made beautiful every State undertaking, public building, and even the commonest objects of daily use, but the inspired masterpieces which summed up the central ideas of Indian religions and served as ideal types for future ages must have been always rare.

In Northern India, chiefly in Bengal, the Cosmic Dance of Dissolution is symbolised in another image, that of Kālī, the Great Mother of the Universe and Destroyer of Time (Pl. XVIIIB). The form it assumes, that of a woman with dishevelled hair and protruding tongue, with blood trickling from the corners of her mouth, a necklace of human heads hung round her neck and an apron of dead men's heads round her waist, as she dances on the prostrate body of her husband, Time, certainly shows a frame of mind which does not shrink from frightfulness in artistic expression.

Occasionally the Kālī image is rendered with great dramatic power and artistic skill, but its depressingly pessimistic mood differentiates it from the Nātārājā, in which the same philosophic concept is symbolised. Kālī's Dance leaves the thought of divine motherhood to the worshipper's imagination or self-consciousness, and concentrates only on the pitiless cruelty and horror of the process of involution. The Nātārājā, with greater subtlety and no less intensity of expression, points to the divine goal, the gateway of eternal bliss. The cosmic process in the latter case is conceived as God's sport or play (Līlā), not as a hopeless tragedy.

We must, however, always bear in mind that the spiritual significance of a religious symbol must be appraised by what it conveys to the mind of the worshipper and not merely by its æsthetic contents. Ethical and æsthetical values do not always coincide, either in the East or the West, and the Western critic is not the best judge of what an Indian symbol may convey to an instructed Indian mind. It is certainly difficult to trace any such direct connection between the Kālī image and the joyous, loving nature-worship of the Vedic hymns as I have suggested for the derivation of the Nātārājā.

It has been supposed that Kālī was originally a primitive Dravidian or Kolarian earth-goddess, who was taken over by the Aryan Brahmans and used as a symbol for the interpretation of their esoteric religious teaching. Sir John Woodroffe, whose researches into Hindu ritual are an invaluable aid to the art student who wishes to go deeper into it, has given the interpretation of the symbolism as it is understood by the intellectual Brahman :

" The scene of the Dance is the cremation ground, amidst white, sun-dried bones and fragments of flesh, gnawed and pecked at by carrion beasts and birds. He the heroic (vira) worshipper (sādhaka) performs at dead of night his awe-inspiring rituals. Kālī is set in such a scene, for She is that aspect of the Great Power which withdraws all things unto Herself at and by the dissolution of the universe. He alone worships without fear who has abandoned all worldly desires and seeks union with Her as the One Blissful and Perfect Experience. On the burning ground all worldly desires are burned away. She is naked and dark like a threatening rain-cloud, for She who is Herself beyond mind and speech reduces all living things into that worldly " nothingness " which, as the Void (Shūnya) of all which we know, is at the same time the All (Pūrna) which is Light and Peace. She is naked, being clothed in space alone (Digambara), because the Great Power is unlimited ; further She is Herself beyond Māyā (Māyātītā) ; that Power of Herself with which She covers Her own nature and so creates all universes. She stands upon the white corpse-like (Shavarūpa) body of Siva. He is white, because He is the illuminating (Prakēsha), transcendental aspect of Consciousness. He is inert, because the Changeless aspect of the Supreme, and She the apparently changing aspect of the same. In truth She and He are one and the same, being twin aspects of the One who is changelessness in, and exists as change." [1]

The explanation of the necklet is that the string of heads is the Garland of Letters (Varnamālā), that is the fifty or fifty-one letters of the Sanskrit alphabet.[2] " The letters symbolise the universe of names and forms (Nāmārūpa), that is Speech (Shabda) and its meaning or object (Artha) ; Kālī the Devourer of all " slaughters," that is, withdraws both into Her undivided Conscious-

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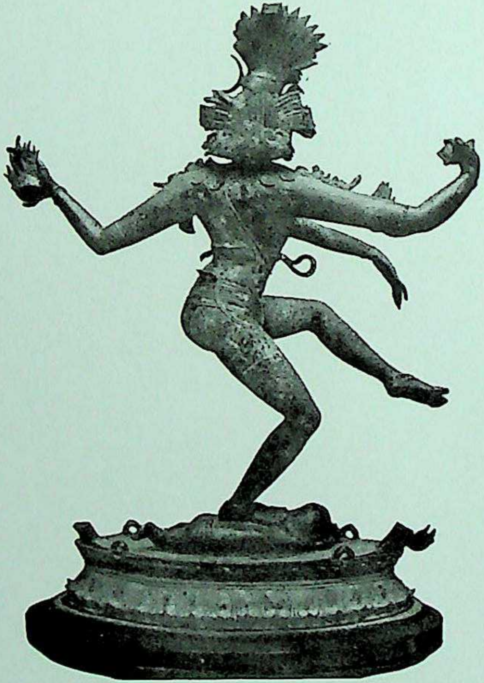
[1] *Garland of Letters*, by Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), pp. 221–22.

[2] Sometimes reckoned as 52, see supra p. 22.

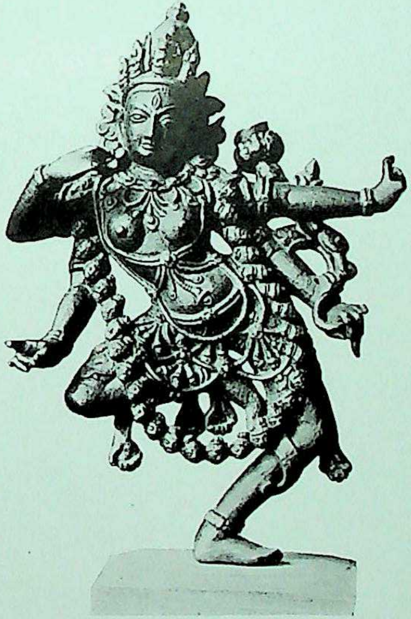
Plate XVIIIa



SIVA AS NĀTĀRĀJA.

(*Madras Museum.*)

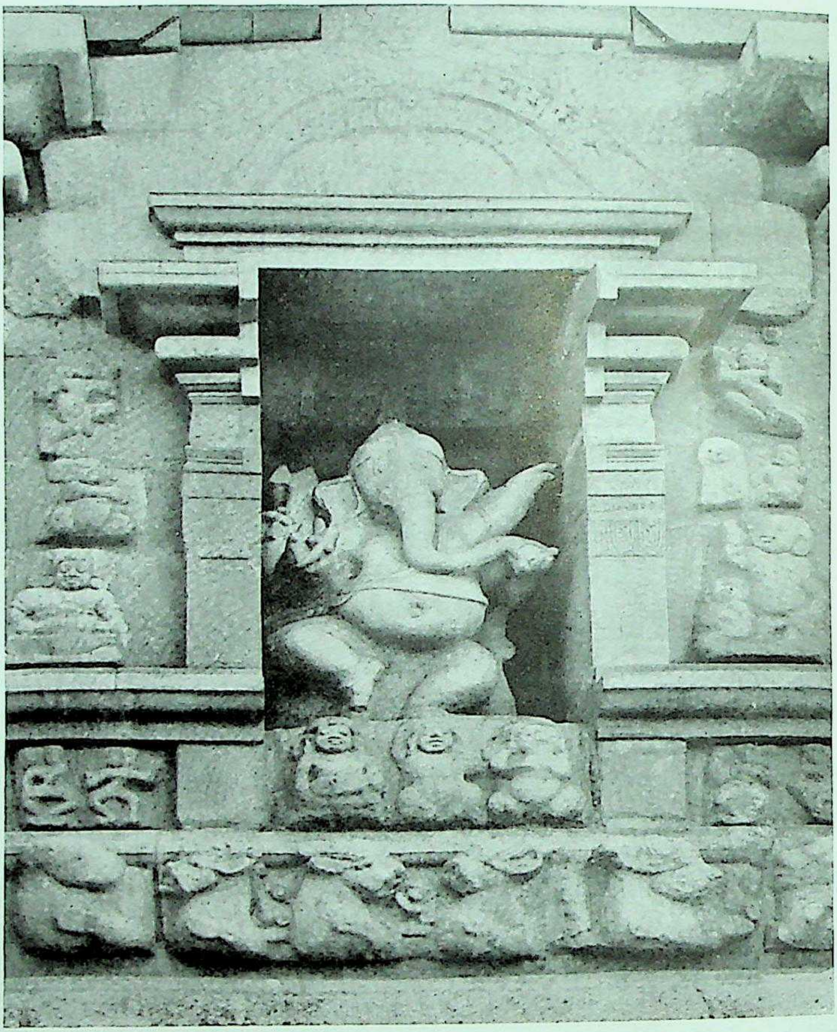
Plate XVIIIb



KĀLĪ'S DANCE.

(*India Museum, Calcutta.*)

PLATE XIX



GANESHA DANCING.

ness at the Great Dissolution of the Universe. She wears the Letters which She as Creatrix bore. She wears the Letters which She as the Dissolving Power takes to Herself again.

The very powerful bronze or copper image of Kālī (Pl. XVIIIB) is the only one yet published which can be put into the same class as the three Nātārājās before described. The lurid details of the scriptural definition given above are discreetly softened without any loss of dramatic expression. The plastic technique, if less finished than in the South Indian images, shows a perfect knowledge of form and articulation. The intense energy of the bodily movement is finely balanced by the upright poise of the head and the horizontal extension of the two upper arms. The flowing lines of the garland and jewelled ornaments respond with subtle variations to the rhythmic movements of the dance. Unfortunately the image is incomplete; the aura and pedestal with the body of Siva are missing.

The sacred dance has many variations in Indian art, typical of different divine moods or aspects of Nature. Besides the terrific Dance of the Tandavan and Kālī's awful Walpurgis night, there is the image of Siva in His Evening Dance (*Sandhya-nritta-mūrti*) (Fig. 18), the gentle rhythmic movements of which suggest the tender harmonies of earth and sky at the peaceful close of a summer's day.

Then there is the rollicking, jovial step of Siva's grotesque son, Ganapati or Ganesha, leading out his satyr troops to join in the cosmic revels (Pl. XIX). The subtle interplay of surfaces and contours which form the basis of the sculptor's art is given to perfection in the treatment of Ganesha's chubby infant's body and its monstrous head, whether he appears as we see him in his elephantine gambols, or whether he is sitting sedately with an air of preternatural sagacity in his rôle of household guardian and god of worldly wisdom.

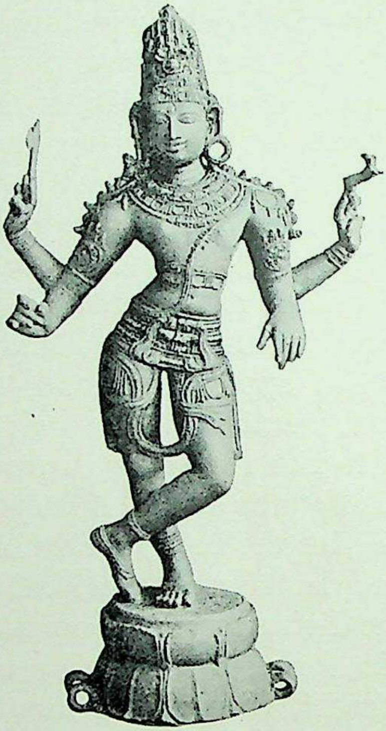


Fig. 18.—THE DANCE OF THE SETTING SUN.

The hunter's or warrior's dance of triumph is shown in the images of Krishna holding up the fearsome serpent Kaliya (Fig. 19), which from its haunt in a pool of the Jumna river had become the terror of the countryside.

Here, however, Krishna appears as the child hero, manifesting his divine power in a playful mood, rather than with the deadly weapons of the Mahābhārata.

The pure ecstasy of the dance, the *joie de vivre* which lifts the body out of itself into the realms of heavenly bliss, is nowhere shown better in Indian art than in the portrayal of the demi-gods and goddesses, the siddhas and siddhis, of the upper air, who hover round the summits of stūpas or holy mountains (Fig. 20) and take part as messengers, dancers, and musicians in divine ceremonials, such as the translation of the Buddha's begging bowl to the Tusitā heavens (Pl. XX).

The idea of semi-divine beings flying without wings presented no difficulty to the Indian mind, for yoga is supposed to give humans the power of levitation by cleansing the body of its earthly dross and releasing it at will from the bonds which tie it to this world. Only the practisers of black magic invoked the aid of such vulgar apparatus as brooms,

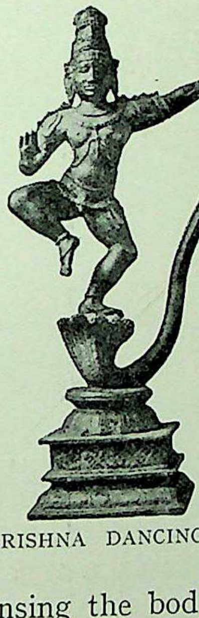


FIG. 19.—KRISHNA DANCING ON KALIYA.

carpets, and magic cars. Their exploits form the chief stock-in-trade of the Indian story-teller, but thrilling incidents of this kind take a very secondary place in the art of the temple sculptor and painter.

It is very rare in this degenerate age to meet with Indian yogis who claim to possess the power of levitation, but in 1887 when I assisted at the celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee in a remote village of the Madras Presidency, a yogi of great repute in the neighbourhood consented in honour of the occasion to leave his solitary retreat and demonstrate the power of yoga for the edification of the village elders and

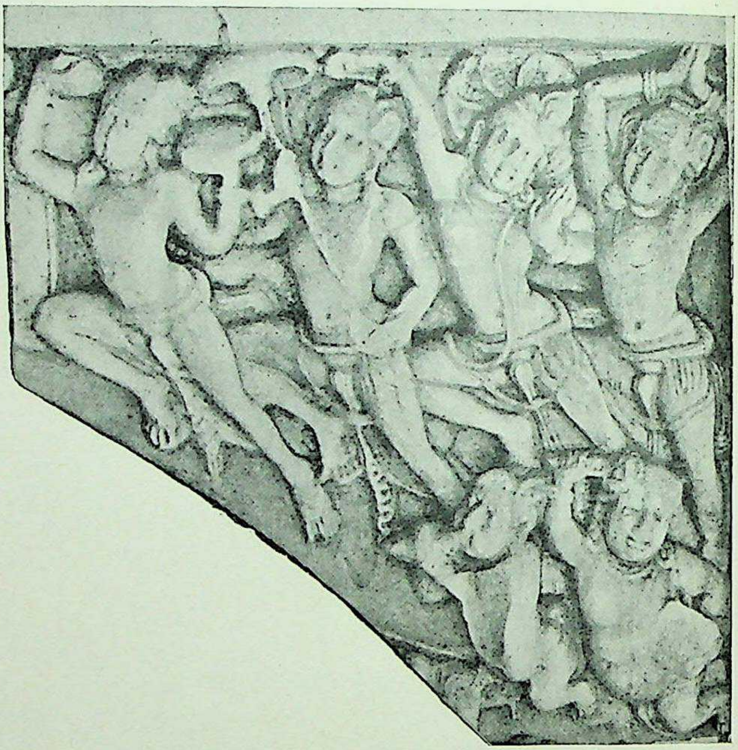
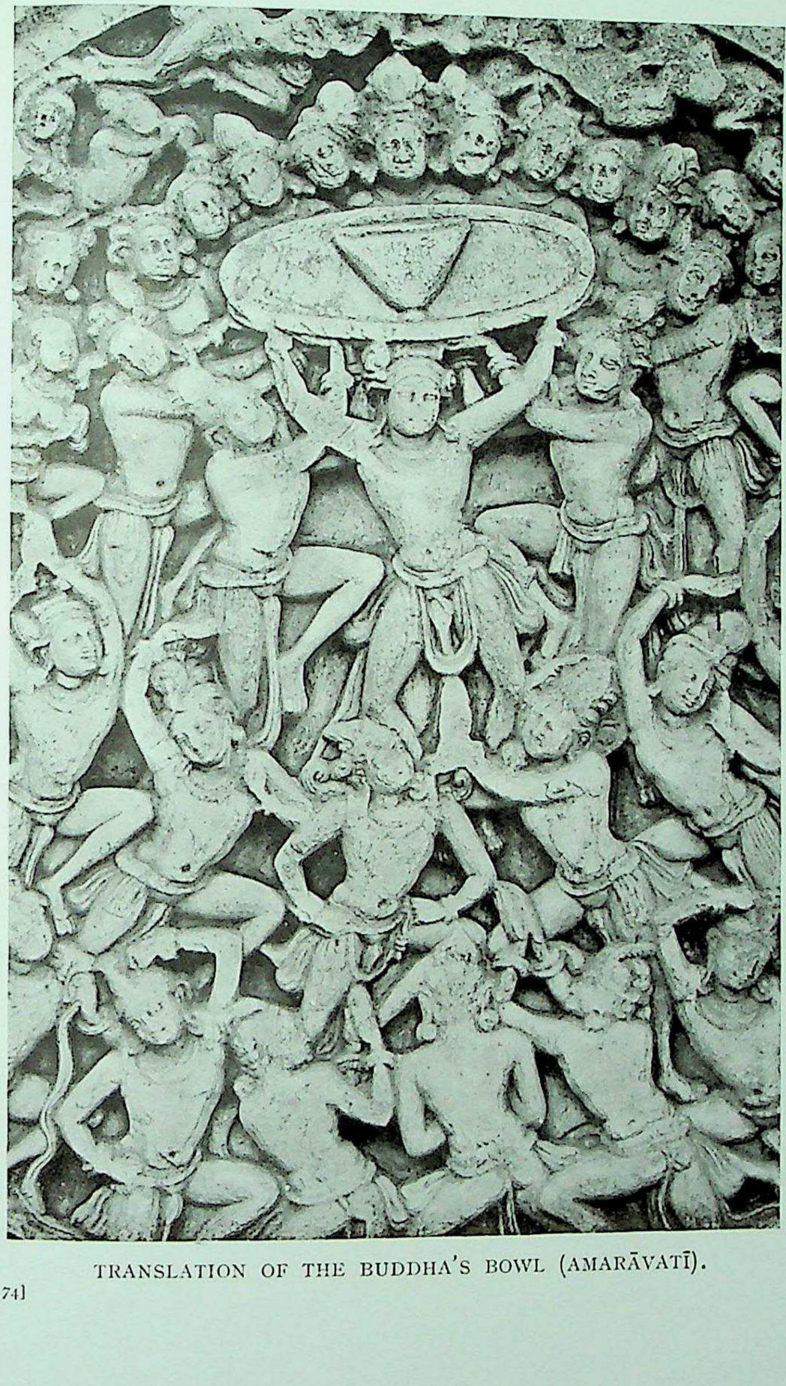


Fig. 20.—FLYING FIGURES, AMARĀVATĪ.



TRANSLATION OF THE BUDDHA'S BOWL (AMARĀVATĪ).

myself. He remained for a considerable time before our eyes, at a distance of a few feet, apparently seated on air without any support, in the pose of a Buddha absorbed in meditation. We were not, however, allowed to see how the yogi ascended from or descended to terra firma.

The sacred dance gave the expert in divine science the power of aerial flight only by the rhythmic movements of the limbs, and this idea the Indian artist expressed with infinite grace and lightness of touch. The lissom bodies of the pure spirits who know divine ecstasy and heavenly bliss float through space with the effortless ease of the swiftest of the winged denizens of the air.

In summing up this brief survey of Indian artistic symbolism, let me repeat that if the student will put aside the conventional academical, sectarian, and geographical or dynastic classifications of Indian art—Gandharan, Mauryan, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Saracenic, Mogul, and the rest—he will discover instead of a bewildering maze of incoherent fantasies, an ordered scheme of artistic thought closely interwoven with Indian philosophy and religion and binding the changing aspects of different periods and local developments into a perfect synthesis. He will discover that the true source of the inspiration of Indian art, of the psychic current which for many centuries flowed north, south, east, and west, was not in the monasteries of Gandhara, but in those wonderful Himalayan mountains whose magnetic force is felt throughout the continent of Asia.

He will learn how Indian art keeps always in close contact with Nature in all her moods. The sun at its rising, zenith, and going-down calls the devout to prayer and meditation and to bring fresh flowers, Nature's own gifts of beauty, to the Creator's shrine. The beauty of flowers and trees speaks to them in its own intimate language of the divine Creator's love. A great Western thinker, Emerson, has truly said that when beauty is sought after for its own sake and not for religion and love it degrades the seeker. So the Indian builder, sculptor, painter, and artists of every kind are not indifferent to the appeal of mountains, rivers, sea, and sky, and all of Nature's infinite store of beauty. But they regard natural things reverently as symbols of divine majesty forming together one great temple of God. The temples of India with their images and ritual, their bathing pools and offerings of fruits and flowers, with their lotus pillars, domes, and spires, are all symbols of that land of beauty and mystery —India itself. And in this thought all Indian art is one.

CHAPTER V

THE LIVINGNESS OF INDIAN ART

For the majority of people in Europe the study of art has no bearing upon real life. It helps to camouflage the ugliness of things: not, as the Indian craftsman pledges himself when he is initiated into his caste, to bring new beauty into life. It is an agreeable intellectual or social diversion; something to talk and write about, to collect in museums and galleries, to exhibit at occasional shows and festivals, and to put aside when the serious work of the day begins. That is how Indian art is generally regarded by us.

But in the real India, of which Europe as yet knows very little, art is still a living force, an inspiration in the common daily round of work which makes for health and happiness, physically, morally, and intellectually. The study of Indian art will not help India at all unless this essential fact is grasped, so that the economical, intellectual, and spiritual values of India's great artistic heritage may be rightly appreciated. For those who are concerned in the administration of the country, it is of vital importance to know what the artistic resources of India are, and to realise how they may he used best for India's advantage. The student of Indian history will profit little unless he learns to penetrate beneath the age-long accumulations of facts and figures and find the real heart and soul of India of which her art is the true expression.

It has been a great misfortune, both for this country and for India, that Indian art has been so little appreciated and understood, from the beginning of British rule down to the present day. One reason for the intellectual and social barriers existing between East and West is that so few educated Indians have the understanding to interpret Indian art and history rightly, either for themselves or for others. Historians have confused the history of art and the history of India by leading us to believe that every successful foreign invasion of India has obliterated more or less completely the record of the past, or so profoundly altered cultural conditions as to make a long series of breaks in Indian life and thought. This is a fundamental error and a travesty of historical facts. For the most astonishing and conspicuous phenomenon in Indian history is the extraordinary stability of the social and intellectual foundations laid by the ancient Aryan lawgivers and spiritual teachers four or five thousand years ago.

Nowhere is this more patent than in the history of Indian art and craft. The record of Indian art, from the days of Asoka in the third century before Christ down to the present day, is clearly writ in a long series of stately monuments as the free and spontaneous development of the ancient Indo-Aryan tradition, borrowing far less from foreign sources than most of the great art schools of Europe have done, yet continually adapting itself within itself to the changing needs of successive generations, while remaining essentially a product of Indian thought and Indian social and economic conditions.

And the fact that this tradition in some parts of India is still vigorously alive and capable, under the favourable conditions which any really efficient administration has a duty to provide, of adapting itself once more to the changing conditions of Indian life, is one that no one who has India's welfare at heart can ignore.

Even in England it is still possible to realise what it means, economically and artistically, for a great national craft to possess a living tradition. In the pottery industry of Staffordshire, in spite of all that science has done to reduce craftsmanship to a mechanical process the potter whose family can trace back its connection with the industry for three or four centuries is generally worth two of those who have started life without any craft heredity. And in the higher branches of art several of the most eminent of modern sculptors owe their success to the fact that they were born, not with a silver spoon in their mouths, but with an earthenware tea-cup in their fingers.

Think then what an advantage it must be, from a purely economic point of view, for a vast country like India to possess millions of hereditary builders, weavers, metal- and wood-workers, potters and other craftsmen, trained for many hundreds of generations in providing all the essential needs of the community in housing, clothing, and daily domestic work, and also in giving the indispensable industrial support to the agricultural workers who provide the people's food. It is not sound political or social economy to deprive these hereditary craftsmen of the prospect of developing their skill to the highest point, as their forefathers did, in the great public works which their country needs, for under our public works system the skilled craftsman becomes a mechanical drudge, working out the paper patterns put before him by his employers. There must be a radical defect in the educational system which steadily depletes the artistic and industrial population of India by inducing the master-builder, the skilled carpenter, metal-worker, and weaver to bring up their children as clerks, journalists, or lawyers, because they find that the more remunerative grades of artistic and scientific work in the Sirkar's service have been barred to them for several generations.

Indian industry certainly needs the best art and the best science Europe can bring to help it. But it does not always get it. There is more real science in the Indian craft tradition than is suspected by those who only study it superficially. Some years ago a crude experiment was made under official auspices in Madras with the object of replacing the traditional brass and copper domestic utensils used all over India by cheaper vessels turned out in aluminium manufactories. By the Indian craft tradition brass and copper are reckoned among the "pure" metals which do not contaminate human food. Brass is compared with the purity of Ganges water, and copper with that of the Jumna. This is not an idle superstition, the truth of it has been confirmed by modern experimental science. It was reported recently that a Swedish scientist had made a series of analytical tests with a view of ascertaining what noxious substances passed into the stomach from various metal vessels used in European kitchens. He found that brass was the safest and best of all metals used for cooking utensils. It was what Indians called "pure." Aluminium he found to be an inferior metal for that purpose. Under certain conditions it contaminated the food and was injurious to health. With regard to copper, I believe it has been ascertained that contaminated water, if kept in clean copper vessels for twenty-four hours becomes so far sterilised that it is fit for drinking. So the beautiful copper jars which are used in India for bringing water from the village well are not to be condemned as medieval and out of date. Modern science in both cases justifies the Indian craft tradition. The effect of the pseudo-scientific Madras experiment, if it achieves its object, will be to injure public health, to obliterate the scientific tradition of Indian hereditary craftsmanship, and to drive the skilled coppersmith and brass-smith into factories for the sole benefit of commercial companies interested in the production of aluminium. This is called the "industrial development" of India, but it is only a form of greedy commercial exploitation which degrades both handicraft and the craftsman.

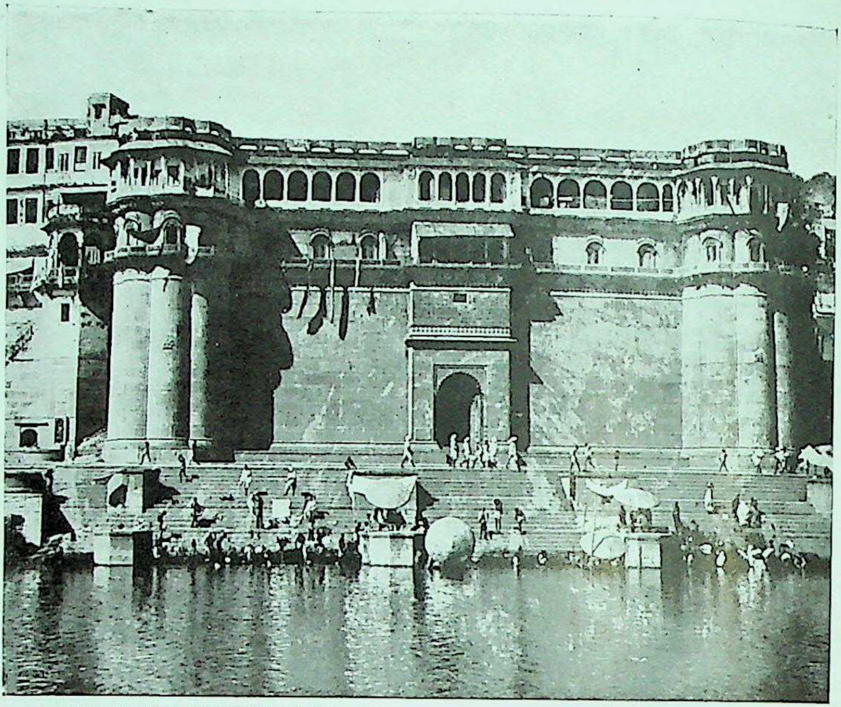
In an hereditary industrial community such as India's, there is no use for art societies, art museums, art books, and art schools to teach the craftsman what art is. In modern Europe art has become a rare hot-house plant, which only rich and fastidious people care to cultivate. But in India the builder still builds beautifully without an architect to show him the way. Modern Indian towns and villages, planned by master-builders after the rules of the Silpa-sāstras, show a pride in honest craftsmanship and a sense of the joy of good work which are rare in modern European building craft. The Indian builder, when not spoilt by the Anglo-Indian building system, has no inclination to "ca' canny," for true artist as he is, he takes real pleasure in his work and does not want to shirk it. And as he represents, not merely an academic cult, but the artistic and religious sense of the people developed by a tradition of many centuries, he finds also a public which shares his feelings and employers who encourage a healthy spirit of craftsmanship.

Building in India has always been a religious rite. The cost of temple building even now is often met by the offerings of pilgrims, the builders themselves consecrating their lives to the work, receiving only a bare pittance of fourpence or sixpence a day. Yet these are highly skilled craftsmen, who have kept Indian art alive for generation after generation, and are never known to clamour for higher pay. The same devotional spirit enters into domestic building. Manu, the Hindu lawgiver, ostracises the speculative builder, putting him under the same ban as priests who make money out of image worship and Brahmans who are ignorant of the scriptures.

Except, therefore, in the great European cities where European conditions prevail, there is no housing problem in India, and where it does exist it is only the outcome of the stupid and wasteful system which ignores Indian traditions and the wonderful artistic opportunities which India's industrial resources still offer.

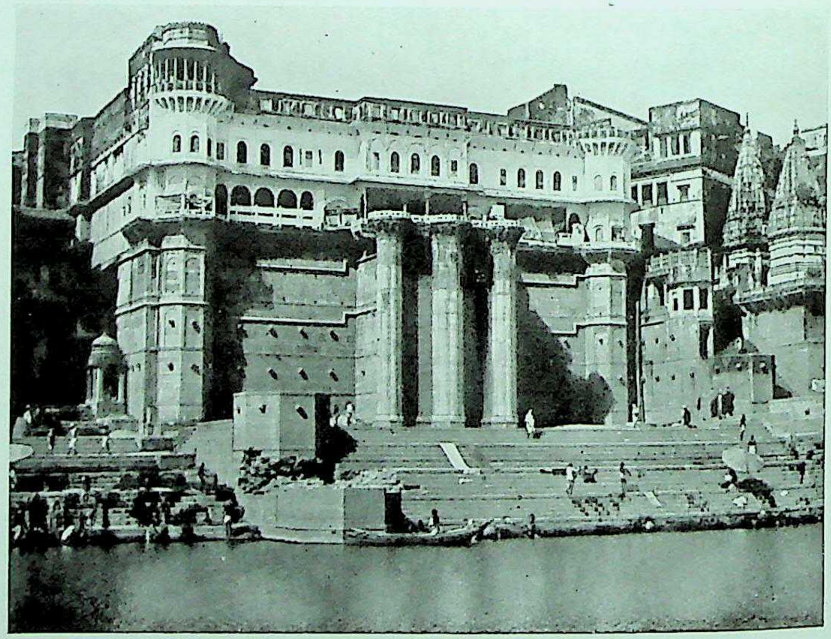
There has been lately some discussion on the question of relieving the gloom and ugliness of English railway stations by hanging pictures on the walls of waiting-rooms. A more excellent way would be to teach the railway engineer that beauty and utility

Plate XXIa



A NINETEENTH-CENTURY PALACE, BENARES (GHOSTA GHAT).

Plate XXIb



NINETEENTH-CENTURY PALACE, BENARES (MUNSHI GHAT).

are not mutually destructive, and that the prime cause of the ugliness lies in his indifferent engineering. When science is moved by a religious spirit and becomes creative, beauty grows out of it spontaneously. For this reason the Indian master-builder, if he were given reasonable scope for his capacity, would make Indian railway stations the most attractive in the world—the task would be completely congenial to him. He would bring to it the knowledge and love by which the excellence of true art is achieved, for the railway lines of India are now the chief pilgrim routes. He would only resume the pious work of providing for the wants of pilgrims which his forefathers from the beginning of Indian history performed so well.

It so happened that some years ago, when a line was being laid through Rajputana, an engineer in the employ of the Alwar State had the inspiration to call in some good Rajput builders, who are among the best in India, to design and build a railway station for the Maharaja's use (Fig. 21). The Alwar railway station remains to this day the most refreshing to the eye, the most practical, and the most comfortable of all the railway stations in India. It shows what might have been done for Indian art and craft, and for the benefit of travellers, if the engineer and master-builder had collaborated in the same way in other places. If, for instance, the splendid craftsmen who in the latter half of the nineteenth century built the two finest palaces on the river front at Benares (Pl. XXI), which are as distinguished for skilful engineering as for their superb artistry, had been called in to co-operate in the building of Howrah railway station or the central station at Bombay, Calcutta would have had a really fine and dignified approach, and Bombay would have been spared the extravagant, tawdry piece of sham Gothic confectionery which the railway authorities put up for the gateway of modern India.

These two Benares buildings show that genuine Indian art does not mean a profusion of elaborate ornament, for they depend entirely for their effect upon the fine proportion which we call "classical," the rhythm of good constructive design, and perfect craftsmanship. All the faults of modern Indian art, bad workmanship, meaningless elaboration of ornament, and feeble constructional design, generally seen at their worst in work made for the European market, are the direct result of the bad administrative system, not peculiar to India, but more or less inherent in all

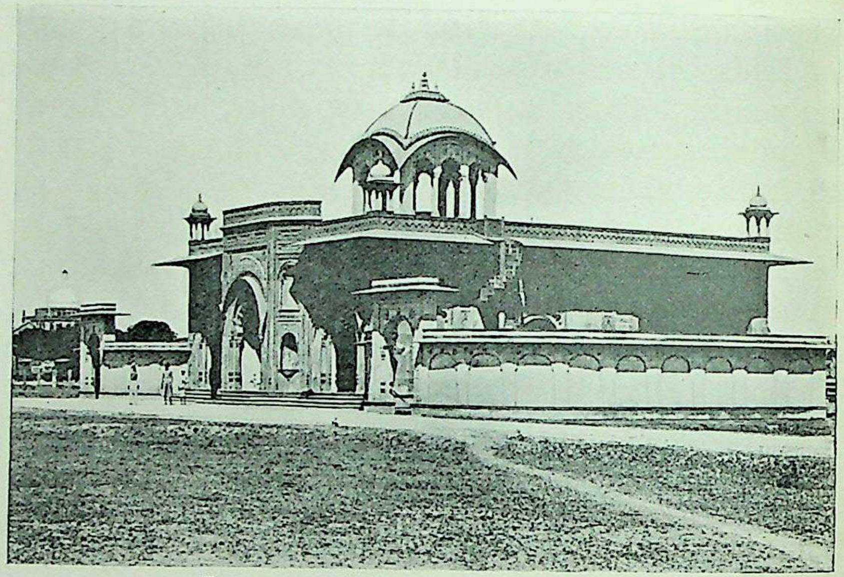


FIG. 21.—ALWAR RAILWAY STATION.

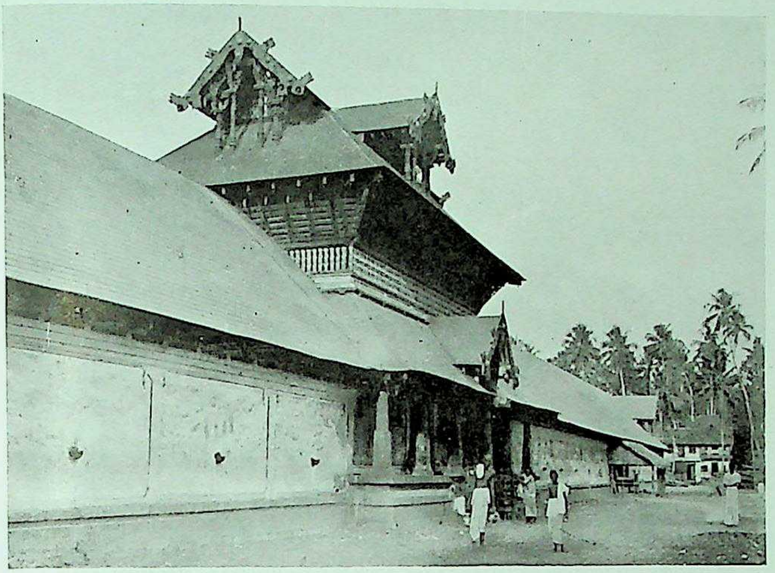
modern European governments, by which art is divorced from science and beauty from utility. In the administrative plans for India's industrial future, whether they be European or Indian, the preservation of Indian art counts for little. Industry and art are departmentally regarded as different spheres of activity, not directly related to each other.

This was not so in India before modern Western ideas were introduced, nor is it so in the India which keeps up the best traditions of the past. Outside this real India the art of the Indian craftsman, by a rigid and wasteful departmental system which has hitherto been impervious to those vital art influences which are now penetrating the intellectual life of Europe, is almost entirely restricted to the building of temples and mosques. But within this sphere there has been, happily for India, sufficient scope to keep Indian art alive. Nearly all modern Indian temples and mosques are vastly superior in craftsmanship and artistry to modern departmental buildings, and sometimes they will bear comparison with the great works which belong to India's illustrious past. The best Indian stone-, wood- and metal-workers are those who are attached to the temple service. The old Indian tradition of fresco painting is kept alive by the temple artists of Rajputana. Architecture in India, as in Europe, has been the mother of all the arts, and under the protection of religion art in India has been sheltered to some extent from the materialistic influences which have degraded the art of modern Europe.

Christianity would have been better served and India would have gained more, if instead of forcing upon India's living craft the cold formal pedantry of our dead Gothic and Classic styles we had allowed the Indian builder to glorify God in the fabric of our churches and cathedrals in the same deep religious spirit which he brings to the building of Jain and Hindu temples or Muhammadan mosques. The Indian craftsman's artistic principles in every century before British rule have fitted every sectarian dogma—Buddhist, Jain, Brahmanical, or Muhammadan. It is deplorable that Christianity of all world-religions has been the only one which has helped to degrade rather than to spiritualise the art of building in India. We sometimes forget that Christianity is an Eastern religion, and that in India we are much nearer to original inspirational sources of Christian art than we are here in Western Europe. Professor Stryzgowski in his book on the origin of Christian church art has proved that these were not, as formerly believed, in Rome, Constantinople, or Alexandria, but in Asia Minor and in Persia, India's hinterland.

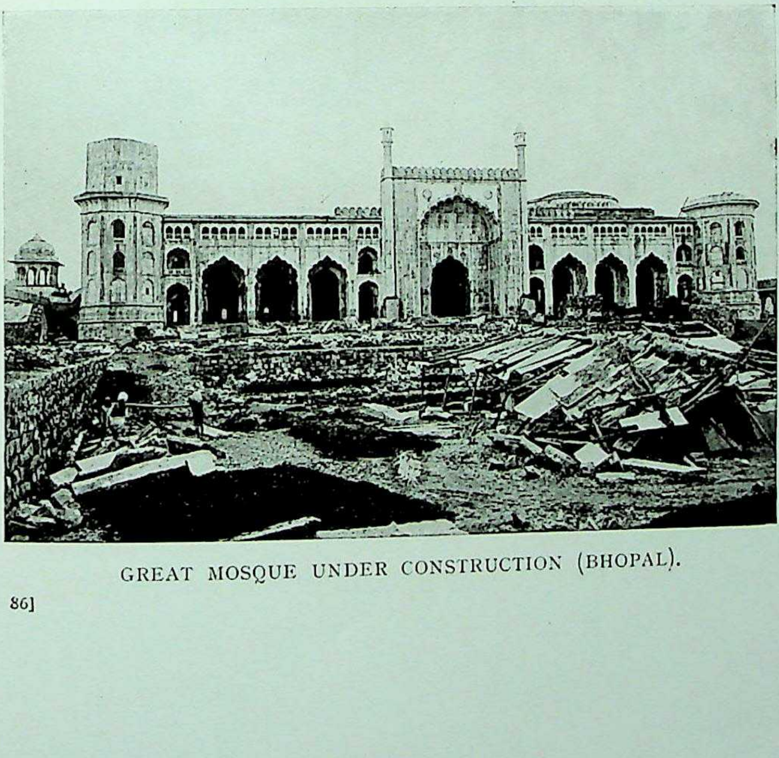
Let us hope that some of the Indian craftsman's religious spirit may be brought into the building of the new Delhi Churches, so that they may become fitting memorials of the comradeship of East and West in the Great War, and help to obliterate the bitter memories of that other great tragedy recorded in the annals of the Mutiny. But before we can expect a truly religious spirit in Church building it must come into our public buildings and into the homes of the people. In this spiritualisation of daily life and work lies the only hope of a real renaissance of art in Europe. The living traditions of Indian art might become the quickening power of that rebirth, if only those concerned in Indian administration, Indians as well as

Plate XXIIa



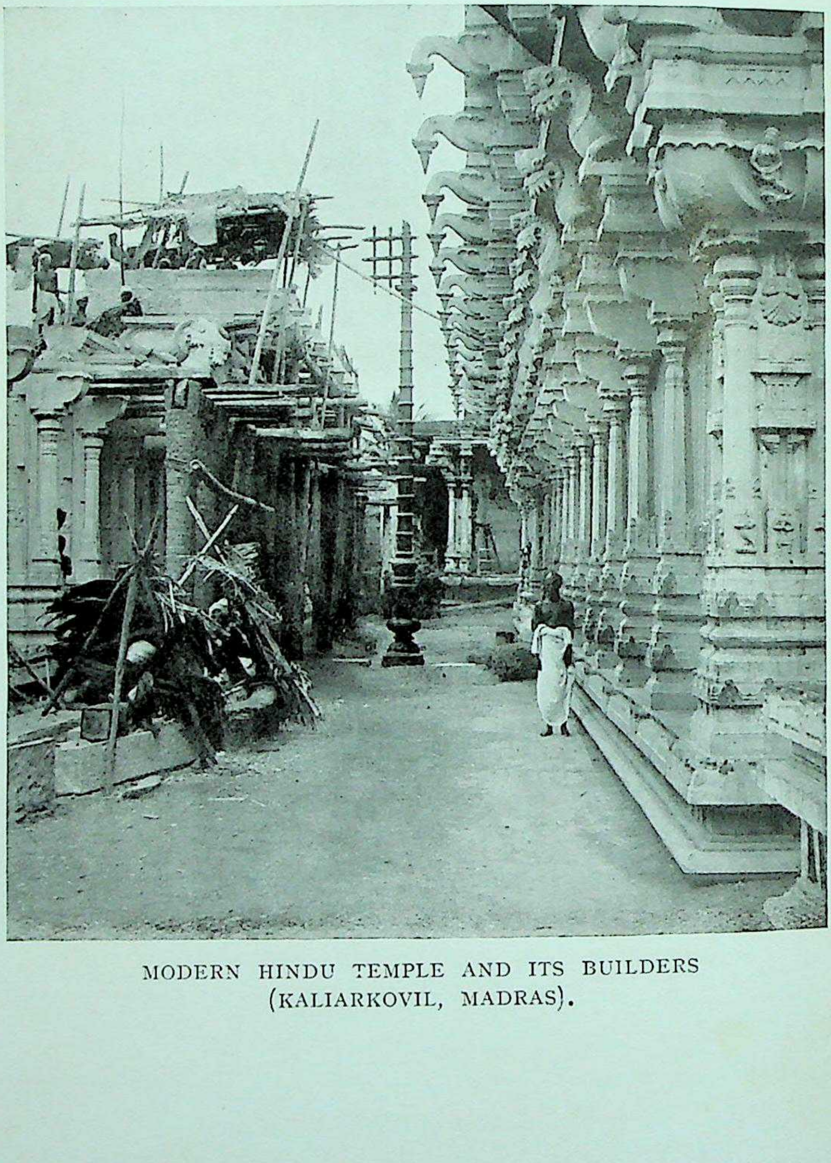
A MODERN HINDU TEMPLE (MATTANCHERI, COCHIN).

Plate XXIIb



GREAT MOSQUE UNDER CONSTRUCTION (BHOPAL).

PLATE XXIII



MODERN HINDU TEMPLE AND ITS BUILDERS
(KALIARKOVIL, MADRAS).

Europeans, would open their eyes and minds to their long-neglected opportunities.

The Macaulay educational system may have stimulated the intellectual regeneration of India, but the misdirection of art education in a country with a living artistic tradition has had a devastating effect. The sayings and writings of many Europeans and of English-educated Indians show how difficult it is for the mentality produced by Western book-learning to discover and understand the art which still lives and grows on Indian soil. For the majority Indian art is only a matter of archæological or academic interest. Sir Lepel Griffin, who lived for many years in that part of India—Rajputana and Central India—where art was growing conspicuously and vigorously under his own eyes, wrote in his monograph on the famous monuments of India that "the love and practice of noble and beautiful architecture seems to have died out in India previous to the advent of the British." Many other authorities who ought to know better have often asserted that the modern Indian master-builder is only a figment of my imagination, that he does not exist, or if he does, he is only a relic of a dead civilisation for which no modern progressive state can find any use.

A conclusive refutation of such misleading and mischievous assertions has been given in an official *Report on Modern Indian Building*, published in 1913 by the Archæological Survey of India, in which a government architect, the late Mr. Gordon Sanderson, exhibited a mass of excellent material collected in a rapid survey of parts of the Central Provinces, Rajputana, and the Punjab. It contains numerous examples of the work of the modern Indian master-builder, which includes village- and town-planning, the building of bridges, palaces, temples, mosques, and private dwellings, many of them admirable architecture and worthy of India's best traditions. Most conspicuous among them is a great mosque (Pl. XXIIB) commenced in the Bhopal State, and designed entirely by Indian builders, which, if it is completed as finely as it was begun, will excel both in size and artistic design the famous mosque built by Shah Jahan at Delhi. It was in the Bhopal State that Sir Lepel Griffin penned the statement above quoted.

Since the building of the New Delhi was started some of the most distinguished English architects have taken up this question, and last year Mr. H. V. Lanchester, F.R.I.B.A., who has had considerable experience as an architect in India, read a paper before the Royal Institute of British Architects[1] in which he endorsed all I have written and said regarding the modern Indian builder.

> "By far the best craftsmanship and the only architecture showing any real development in any of the vernacular styles," said Mr. Lanchester, "I found in works away from official centres and the influence of Government control. I made enquiries as to the cost of such work and found it less than we should have paid for the same thing, not reckoning our overhead charges, which range from 22 to 28 per cent., to cover cost of drawings, estimates, and supervision. Our obsessions are, therefore, not only destructive artistically, but cannot even claim the only merit that would excuse them—that of being cheap."

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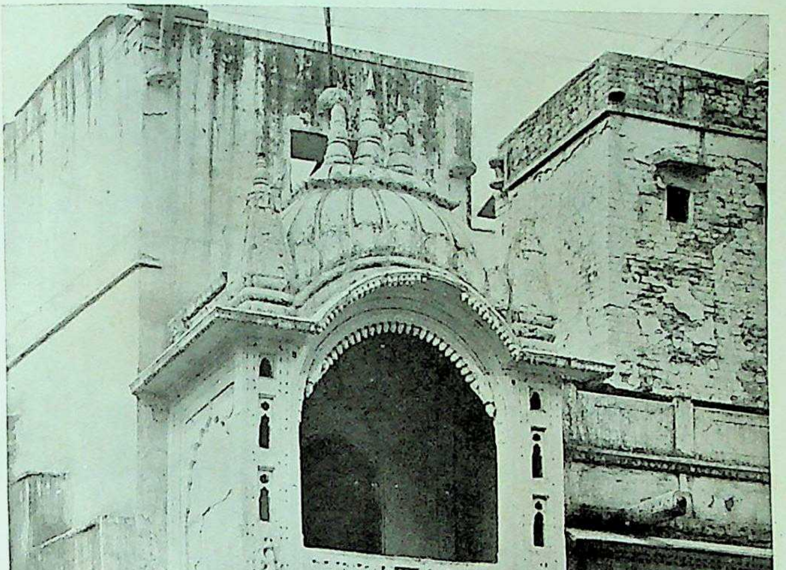
[1] Printed in the *Journal of the R.I.B.A.* for March 24, 1923.



DETAIL OF MODERN HINDU TEMPLE (LASHKAR, GWALIOR STATE).

The modern Indian master-builder, Mr. Lanchester declared from his personal observation, was not a fiction but a fact. He did not wish by any means to take money away from such works as the Ganges Canal System.

He maintained, as I have always maintained, that our Public Works' architectural methods are dearer and not cheaper than the traditional Indian —and no one with first-hand knowledge of the subject would be justified in disputing the fact. It is, as Professor Beresford Pite observed, a little amazing, if not shocking, to find the personal standard of individual taste and sense of proportion and fitness in which we have educated ourselves in this little corner of the West applied to the historic architecture of India.

Mr. Herbert Baker, A.R.A., one of the architects of the New Delhi, in discussing Mr. Lanchester's paper admitted that the master-builder might be left in sole charge in the case of simpler buildings of Indian character. That indeed would be an excellent beginning of the reform of Public Works' architectural methods. I have never contended that it would be possible now, under the conditions created by departmental methods of the nineteenth century, to hand over all building enterprises initiated by Government to the entire control of Indian master-builders, but that there ought to be close and sympathetic collaboration between the European, or the English-educated Indian architect, and the hereditary Indian master-builder, so that Indian building traditions might be gradually adopted to the public needs of the present day.

Mr. Baker alluded to some of the administrative difficulties which might be encountered in working out this essential reform—a reform which lies at the root of India's artistic life. "The Indian craftsman," he said, "is generally a farmer,[1] and he has a delightful and amiable habit, when it rains, of going off to his farm. And he is very bad in giving estimates, so you can imagine the harassed Minister answering the rain of parliamentary questions, and demands for returns of estimates, and retrenchment commissioners hunting the *mistri* to his farm."

The inference seems to be that Indian art, or art in India, must be sacrificed to departmental convenience. Should it not rather be the business of the harassed Minister to discover the means by which the Indian master-builder—the chief representative of a great historic tradition in art—may be allowed to live? In this case, as in so many others, it is necessary to put oneself in the position of the Indian craftsman in order to discover the cause of his inconvenient habits. They are mostly, if not altogether, the direct and natural consequence of the disastrous architectural monopoly established by the Public Works Department, and of its inefficient, defective, and short-sighted architectural methods. If the members of the Royal Institute had to work under similar conditions many of them might be glad to possess a cabbage patch somewhere up-country to which they could resort when business was slack, and so help to keep the home fires burning.

Fergusson, more than sixty years ago, in his

---

[1] That is to say, in former times Indian rulers rewarded the services of fine craftsmen by grants of land, which became an inheritance for the craftsmen's descendants.

History of Indian Architecture pointed out clearly the mistaken methods of the Indian Public Works Department. I myself for nearly forty years have tried to teach that the livingness of Indian art (not the Indian-ness) is the only thing that really matters. The subject is now said to be a controversial one into which a discreet person must not enter, lest he should embarrass the routine of departmental work. But indiscretion in this case is the better part of valour, for this is a controversy in which the whole future of art in India is involved, and one that only can be avoided by avoiding the heart of the matter—all that is vital and essential in art.

An art which is closely related to life and work is infinitely more important and humanly interesting than one which is related only to museums and mummies. If India is not to be wholly submerged in the mire of modern commercialism her art must continue, as it has done from the dawn of history, to spiritualise Indian daily life and work. It must not be only an archæological study, a dilettante amusement for educated Indians and Europeans, a departmental hobby, or an advertisement for Empire festivals.

No one would wish to depreciate in any way the magnificent work which has been done, and is still being done, under British rule in mitigating and preventing famines and in making the desert soil productive. But man does not live by bread alone ; it is the spiritual growth rather than increase of numbers which counts in the progress of humanity. Without the artistic spirit stimulating her daily life, India will lack the divine force which created her civilisation and one of the greatest intellectual empires of the world. Europe can give her no compensation for that loss.

As yet, however, there is no need to despair of the future of art in India. It rests now entirely with Indians themselves whether they will let it live or die. So far English-educated Indians, with some bright exceptions, have been more blind to their country's real needs, more indifferent to the appeal of art, and less capable of understanding it, than the majority of Europeans. But a fine unbroken tradition of four or five thousand years which still holds up both to Europe and to India an example of sincerity and truth in art must contain within itself some of those qualities of stability and enduring strength which belong to the Himalayas, that glorious Abode of Snow, India's perennial source of life and inspiration.

And on such a stable foundation every good builder would wish to build the temple of art.

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